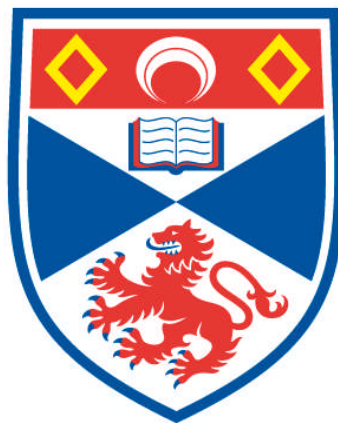


**THE TRIUNE CONVERSATION:
TRINITARIAN DESCRIPTION AND THEOLOGICAL ONTOLOGY
IN ROBERT W. JENSON'S 'SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY'**

Thomas S. Gatewood III

**A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD
at the
University of St Andrews**



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The Triune Conversation:
Trinitarian Description and Theological Ontology in
Robert W. Jenson's *Systematic Theology*

A Thesis Submitted to
the Faculty of St. Mary's College
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By
Thomas S. Gatewood III

St. Andrews, Scotland
May 2005



Abstract

This thesis proposes that Robert W. Jenson's identification of the triune God faithfully describes the persons and being of God. To support this I examine the most basic argument of Jenson's *Systematic Theology*: that God is freely but truly identified by and with Jesus Christ. This includes discussion of Jenson's starting point, his formal description of the three persons of God, and the theological ontology that this entails. Throughout I argue that Jenson's trinitarian description and theological ontology is rightly controlled by an *a posteriori* logic of response to the triune God's actual life with and for his people. Central to this is the way that Jenson creatively and courageously uses Jesus Christ's life and person as the controlling criterion of all dogmatic statements about God.

Finally, this thesis proposes that Jenson's basic insights are made more exact when Jesus Christ is recognized in his perfect relation with the Father and Spirit before, in and after created history. To elucidate this suggestion the nature of the triune God's election and self-determination is reconsidered in light of Jenson's critical insight that the persons are mutually, not identically, perfect in deity. This in turn leads to a brief description of the eternity and freedom of the triune conversation that begins and ends with the Word who is Jesus Christ.

Declarations

I, Thomas S. Gatewood III, hereby certify that this thesis, which is approximately 99,000 words in length, has been written by me, that it is the record of work carried out by me, and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for a higher degree.

Date 1 Aug 05 Signature of Candidate _____

I was admitted as a candidate for an M. Litt. in September 2002 and as a candidate for the degree of Ph.D. in Theology in February 2003; the higher study for which this is a record was carried out in the University of St. Andrews between 2002 and 2005.

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I hereby certify that the candidate has fulfilled the conditions of the Resolution and Regulations appropriate for the degree of Ph.D. in the University of St. Andrews and that the candidate is qualified to submit this thesis in application for that degree.

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Our formulation is again and again that the Christian message (in all its content) means Jesus Christ. In the declaration and development of its whole content it always has reference to Him. His name, therefore, is not incidental to it. It is not a name which has to be pronounced for the sake of completeness or adornment. It is there at the very heart of it as the central and decisive Word, the Word which is always present with every other word and to which it must always return. For in uttering His name it says that it refers to Him, and therefore to its true object.

- Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV/1, 20-21

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The Significance of Being Direct

Robert Jenson's identification of the triune God is direct. That is, his description of the persons and being of God unequivocally follows scripture's witness to the Lord's freedom in relation to his people. This directness reveals a properly basic assumption, namely, that God is an object of our knowledge. Jenson clarifies this when he explains that an object is something we can see, hear, and intend.¹ This *can* be true, according to Jenson, if we hear God's voice in the church's proclamation and see him in the objects to which this voice directs our attention. For Jenson, this *is* true because God is identified by Jesus and his community in such a way as to be identified with them. Noting this, we could go on to examine Jenson's radically sacramental view of the church. Instead, this thesis will examine Jenson's doctrine of the Trinity that develops the primal assertion that God is identified by and with Jesus Christ.

This primal assertion is, according to Jenson, logically consistent with two things: first, the metaphysical claims of the biblical narrative, and, second, the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity. This thesis is an attempt to examine this suggestion through a careful reading of Jenson's trinitarian description and theological ontology. Central to both is the suggestion that God is identified by and with contingent events and is free in this as the Lord. This contentious point is best captured in Jenson's assertion that 'the gospel does not tell of work done by a God antecedently and otherwise determined, but itself determines who and what God is.'² This given, Jenson describes Jesus, his Father, and their Spirit as the persons of God who are in themselves what they are in their gracious relation to Israel and the church. In turn, Jenson's theological ontology conceptualizes his trinitarian description without modulating the oddity of the canonical witness to the persons of God. The result is that God's being is described as the perfect mutual action of the Father, Son, and Spirit. Whereas the tradition has assumed that God is not an object for us and so is

¹ Robert Jenson, *Systematic Theology, vol. I: The Triune God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 13. Hereafter abbreviated *ST* volume, and page.

² *ST* I, 165.

not known in his being,³ Jenson argues that God is known in his being because these three persons are truly known as they act and so *are* God.

To examine this argument we shall describe in chapter one the point at which Jenson begins his identification of the triune God and the systematic insights that follow from this. In chapters two through four, we shall describe the way Jenson uses his systematic insights to clarify description of the Father, Son, and Spirit. In each case, Jenson reconceptualizes a particular doctrine in light of a vital and odd claim of the scriptural witness. In chapter five we shall examine the way that Jenson conceptualizes the unity of the previously described persons. Finally, in chapter six, we will ask what effect an inadequate description of one person of God has on this identification of God and the description of his perfectly free and loving communion.

The doctrine of the Trinity, as Jenson uses it, is the great *specificum* of Christian thinking, speaking and worship.⁴ Within this, Jesus Christ is offered as the controlling centre of our reflection on God's personal diversity and essential singularity.⁵ Therefore, what we say about God and his triune life must correspond to this person's actuality because he is God with the Father in the Spirit. Jenson's insistence on the proscriptive and descriptive aspects of doctrine follows from this.⁶ He suggests that the doctrine of the Trinity 'asserts that God in himself is *in fact* not other than he is in his history among and with us...*Therefore*, says the doctrine of the Trinity, we will speak falsely of God if we speak of him otherwise than as we speak

³ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I.1, suggests that God is the object of theological knowing, but is not known in his being. Instead, he is known through his effects. Therefore, Thomas suggests that 'we cannot know what God is, but only what he is not.' (*Summa Theologiae*, I.3-prologue) If Thomas represents the standard Western opinion, then John of Damascus represents the Eastern version; he suggests, *The Orthodox Faith* I.iv, that 'it is impossible to define the essence of God.' Immediately before this, he suggests that 'what [God] is in His essence and nature is absolutely incomprehensible and unknowable.'

⁴ Robert Jenson, 'The Hidden and Triune God,' *International Journal of Systematic Theology* vol. 2 no. 1 (2000), 7.

⁵ *ST* I, 222.

⁶ Jenson's insistence, *ST* I 19, that theological language functions in the material mode sets his discussion of the nature of doctrine apart from the otherwise compatible analysis of George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1984), 106-7. The difference is captured in Lindbeck's suggestion that 'ontological interpretations of the Trinity do not, or should not, be made communally normative for the way Christians live and think.' The whole of Jenson's project asserts that the way we speak must correspond to the object that gives himself to us and so determines the way we can and must think, worship and live.

of him in telling this story.’⁷ Christian speech about and to God is therefore response to God’s self-communication in which God is really known as he is in himself. God is not the cause of created effects that reveal him, but is the Lord God who is present with his people as the triune God. Therefore, to know the persons of God in their mutual action is to know God’s being. This is the case because there is no being beyond the actuality and mutuality of the Father, Son, and Spirit.

The sufficiency of this confession is regularly controverted in the contemporary context; we must, so it is argued, say more about God’s being, perfection, and aseity than this logic allows. This contemporary debate about the freedom of God leads to a simple question: Is the identification of God and confession of his holiness sufficient clarification of his ontological otherness? Or, is it necessary to move from the economy to do constructive theology that affirms God’s immanence *and* transcendence? Because Jenson grasps the issues at hand and offers a consistent and cogent answer, he makes an ideal object for study. In other words he is a good conversation partner and guide in this debate about God’s relation to history, time, and created finitude. At present no extended examinations of Jenson’s basic arguments that grapple with the way that Jenson accommodates the oddity of the canonical witness exist. Moving beyond merely reviewing Jenson’s project, this thesis charitably engages Jenson’s most basic argument to evaluate his identification and description of God’s eventful actuality and perfect freedom.

⁷ ST I, 19.

Chapter 1

Resurrection, Israel's God, and the Confessing Ecclesia

I. Eventful Beginnings

A scant six paragraphs into his prolegomena, Robert Jenson begins to make decisive statements about the gospel, the church, and God that reveal the starting point and character of his theology. This happens as he gives a brief synopsis of the gospel message. According to Jenson, the gospel is the message of the crucified one's resurrection.¹ This news, which reports a specific event and intends universal import, assumes a particular understanding of life, death, history, creation, and its creator.² Working within this conceptual nexus, the gospel narrates a work of God that identifies God as 'the one who raised Jesus from the dead.'³ Jenson tries to work within this same nexus of assumptions to identify the gospel's God as the triune God of the church. In doing so, Jenson must make it clear that the one God of Israel is identified by the risen Jesus and identifies himself with and through this risen one. In effect, he must make it clear that the gospel, Israel's description of the Lord, and the doctrine of the Trinity identify the one and the same God.

Jenson explains this gospel a few pages later and writes, 'if we remember what the word "resurrection" must mean in the linguistic context where it comes to mean anything at all, Israel's Bible, we will understand that to attend to a putative resurrection must be to attend to a certain putative God.'⁴ It is critical to note two decisive methodological moves that Jenson makes at this point. The first sets the Resurrection within the context of Israel's Bible. For Jenson, the news that Jesus has been raised from the dead is only significant within the linguistic and narrative world shaped by Israel's life with God and God's faithfulness to Israel. Central to this is the pattern of promises that God makes to Israel that lead to the hope of a general

¹ *Systematic Theology*, vol. I: *The Triune God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 179. See as well *ST* I, 4, 12, 31, 32, 165 and 195. Hereafter abbreviated *ST* by volume, and page. Italics in quotations are Jenson's unless otherwise noted.

² N.T. Wright, 'Jesus and the Resurrection' in *Jesus Then & Now: Images of Jesus in History and Christology* ed. Marvin Meyer and Charles Hughes (Harrisburg, PENN: Trinity Press International, 2001), 57-65, uses this same logic to argue two things: first, that the resurrection of Jesus was the centre of the Christian message and movement; second, that only the Resurrection explains why and how Christians continued to speak of Jesus as the Messiah.

³ Colossians 2:12

⁴ *ST* I, 12.

resurrection. Only when there is an operative set of expectations and hopes, questions and assumptions that are connected to Abraham, the Exodus and exile, can the news that 'Jesus is alive and will not die again'⁵ be a message of final significance for Israel and the world.

The second methodological move that Jenson makes is to interpret the Resurrection from within this context as the event that conclusively identifies God.⁶ For example, Jenson argues that

to attend to the resurrection is to attend to God self-identified as "the one who raised the Lord Jesus." Whoever did that, the church says, is the reality we mean by "God." To attend to the Resurrection and to attend to this particular putative God, to take either as the object of our reflection, are the same.⁷

Jenson's theology can be read as a systematic attempt to identify God in such a way that all material descriptions of God correspond to this event. In effect, the first methodological move makes the second conceptual move possible. Together the two lead to a description of promise-making God whose utterances create history, Israel, and Israel's history that has this proleptic ending. In this way, Jenson's reading of the Old Testament narrative guides his reading of the gospel as it provides a theocentric conception of history. In another way, his reading of Israel's history is enlightened by the end of that history made known in Jesus' life, death, resurrection, and continued life. This dialectical movement between context and crisis characterizes the way that Jenson reads the one biblical narrative to identify the one biblical God.

Having begun with the event of Jesus' resurrection, Jenson moves in two directions: first, to the context of Israel's life with God, and, second, to the church's life with God. Making this second move, Jenson focuses on God's identification by and with the risen Jesus and his community.⁸ According to Jenson, this second move takes us immediately and essentially to the doctrine of the Trinity. It also takes us immediately and essentially into the life of the church as it worships in trinitarian specificity. In both cases, the logic of prayer to the Father with the Son in the Spirit

⁵ ST I, 4.

⁶ T.F. Torrance, *Space, Time and Resurrection* (Edinburgh: Handsel, 1976), 74, describes the raising of the Christ as the ultimate event whose truth is equal to the truth of God: he explains that '*It is the primal datum of theology, from which there can be no abstracting* and the normative presupposition for every valid dogmatic judgement and for the meaningful construction of a Christian theology.'

⁷ ST I, 12.

⁸ ST I, 12-13.

'must govern the church's formulation of her belief'.⁹ This is and must be the case as the church attends to the 'gospel in its character as witness to a determinate reality.'¹⁰ This attending requires response to God and proclamation to others; in both the church fulfils her mission: 'to see to the speaking of the gospel, whether to the world as message of salvation or to God as appeal and praise.'¹¹ Practically, attending to this event, to this God, and so to this message places theology in a multi-directional conversation; the church speaks with God in worshiping the Father with the Son in the Spirit and with others in obedience to the Father with the Son in the Spirit. In this dialogue, God and humans have being in different ways as each speaks and responds and so becomes an agent in a common history and objects for each other.

This characteristic movement from the gospel message to Israel's narrative to the doctrine of the Trinity forms the basic pattern of Jenson's thought that we will trace and evaluate in this thesis. In this movement, Jenson identifies the triune God without stepping out of the church's response to God's self-revealing word. He also resists qualifying God's self-identification by moving from historical occurrence to a timeless eternity. As a result, the triune God is characterized as a 'talkative' God whose actions are inseparable from his Word. This one God speaks his Word in Jesus and listens to those who speak with Jesus in their common Spirit. Ultimately, this identification of God requires a corresponding ontology in which the persons of God are actual in relation across time or in conversation.

Before we examine Jenson's trinitarian description and theological ontology, it is important to note more fully the critical points from the context of Israel's Scriptures that root Jenson's identification of God. This is important because these critical points are closely related to the way in which he appropriates the Nicene tradition. In this chapter I shall follow Jenson from where he begins to his use of the Nicene confession. In and through this I shall explain more fully Jenson's initial and determining decisions about God's temporal self-determination. This contentious description of the triune God will then be set in context by contrasting Jenson with Karl Barth. Finally, I shall describe the way that Jenson appropriates and uses the Nicene tradition. At this point it is essential to make clear why Jenson begins with an

⁹ *ST I*, 13.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *ST I*, 11.

event, thinks from this event about the life of the Lord, and so focuses on the eventful actuality of the triune God.

II. The Essential Context and a Basic Assumption

Jenson reiterates that ‘an initial and determining theme of theology, and one with systematic emphasis in the system here offered, must be the identification of God by the Resurrection of Jesus.’¹² The God that is so identified is the triune God that the church calls Father, Son, and Spirit. The validity of this name is dependent on the Resurrection, which confirms the identity of Jesus as the Son of God and the identity of God as the Father of this crucified man. Before this event, Jesus’ identity was essentially indeterminate; his sonship and his way of faithfulness were contestable. In a limited sense, this is not the case for the one he called ‘Father.’ Instead, this other is the God of Creation, Exodus, Torah, the God of Abraham, David, and the prophets. This is the Lord who, having raised Israel from Egypt, made promises to go with his people, to protect them, and to bring about a new order in creation through their life together. The Lord’s way of being and being faithful is clarified in and through these relations and actions that are narrated in Israel’s scriptures. Recognizing this means appreciating the way that God has or determines his identity in relation to and distinction from Israel. In the next chapter we will look more directly at the God who is identified in these contexts. Initially, it is more important to be clear about the basic conceptual notions that follow from this vital description of the Lord’s way in and with creation.

II.1 The Way of YHWH

Jenson begins to clarify God’s way of being present to and for Israel by reading Deuteronomy 26:5-9 as a paradigmatic expression of Israel’s identification of God. This ‘communal confession’ speaks of Abraham, oppression in Egypt, Israel’s cry for release to YHWH, the deliverance of the people, and the giving of the land. This compressed narrative, in a way typical of the Old Testament, identifies God with a proper name and identifying descriptions. YHWH is this one who raised Israel from

¹² *ST I*, 42.

Egypt and is worthy of praise and obedience as the faithful God of Israel. This God has been faithful to his promises and this people by bringing them into the Promised Land. Moreover, God gives his name to Israel so that they may call on him in prayer and praise. God also makes other promises that open a particular future to his people. Throughout this dialogue driven by promises and faithful action, the interplay between name and identifying descriptions determines Israel's identification of God and its relationship to God. Jenson explains that if 'asked who God is, Israel's answer is, "Whoever rescued us from Egypt." Asked about her access to this God, Israel's answer is, "We are permitted to call on him by name."' ¹³ As Israel lives the life of obedience in hope of future exaltation it does so remembering God's past faithfulness and hoping for future faithfulness. In sum, when Israel identifies the Lord, he is described as the faithful one who is active and present in creation; most importantly, this one Lord has a history and a promised future that graciously includes Israel.

Jenson notes that another important example of this pervasive logic is Exodus 20:2. Of God's self-identification to Moses Jenson writes, 'the name and narrative description are set side by side to make one identification, "I am JHWH your god, who brought you out of the Land of Egypt."' ¹⁴ As God gives Israel the law and commands their obedience, he reminds them that he is an agent in the history of this people. God speaks of himself as this one who, having acted in the past, continues to make himself known and available by revealing his name, commanding worship and obedience. In both of these examples, the Lord introduces himself as the active and determining agent in Israel's history who acts to bring the people to himself. In this self-introduction, God reveals his name and so opens the possibility of continued conversation with Israel.

In Israel's Scriptures, God is known by his chosen community, which his gracious action liberates for conversation and obedience. As he is known by a particular name and identified with particular events, Israel's God has an identity of which he is jealous. Jenson notes that unlike other gods that embody the logic of the typical religious attitude, 'that the principle of individuation, whatever it may be, cannot finally apply to deity,' ¹⁵ Israel's God is known by a specific name that

¹³ST I, 44.

¹⁴ST I, 44. See also Genesis 12:8, 13:4, 32:30; Psalms 79:6; Ezekial2 20:5-26 and Isaiah's Trial, 42:6-8, 43:3.

¹⁵ST I, 47.

individuates his being in a decisive way. Of the name that marks this individuation, God is jealous. Jenson continues, 'He neither shares his name, nor is addressed by an accumulation of other deities' names.'¹⁶ According to Jenson, jealousy is a fitting adjective because the Lord 'is truly identified by the temporal events of Exodus and Resurrection.'¹⁷ Whereas normal gods are only indirectly known by the riddles and clues that are their 'revelations,' Israel's God is really and truly the one who liberates Moses and the mixed throng from under Pharaoh's thumb. YHWH is really and truly the God who speaks from the burning bush, who gives manna, and who leads the people in the fire and cloud.¹⁸ This one is actually and truly involved in time and therefore has a history, which can be narrated without misconstruing his perfect being. Jenson explains that 'in time, each thing must indeed be "itself and not another" or not be at all; temporal entities must be jealous of their identities or cease. Usual gods care little for their identities just because they are not personally invested in time: indeed, their deity consists in their immunity to time... Not so the God of Israel.'¹⁹ As God acts for and with Israel God freely and truly invests his identity in his eventful existence, he is not other than this one who makes himself known and relates to Israel.

Critical for Jenson is the recognition that God is the agent of the Exodus and of all the acts narrated in Israel's scripture; God's existence and being are not safe and secure beyond or above these contingent events. Jenson clarifies the central insight that follows from this: he explains that 'God is freely but, just so, truly self-identified by, and so with, contingent created temporal events.'²⁰ This metaphysically fundamental fact of Israel's faith implies that the events of the past, which might not have happened, but in fact did happen, are truly the history of the one God. They are

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ In 'The Person's of God's Identity', chapter five of *ST I*, Jenson argues that the persons of the drama in Israel's history by which God is identified both are God and other than God. Paradigmatically, the messenger of the Lord speaks for God and is also God speaking. This ambiguity allows Israel to speak of God's presence in ways of conviction and deference. God is present even as this other. See as well, Robert Jenson, "The Trinity and the Bible" *Pro Ecclesia* vol. 11, no. 3 (2002), 329-339.

¹⁹ *ST I*, 47. To anticipate a bit we might quote Augustine, *The Trinity* trans. Edmund Hill, O.P. (Brooklyn, New City Press, 1991), Book II, 114, 'No one will doubt, surely, that in this case (the Exodus) God did not appear to mortal eyes in his own substance, but by creature control, and a physical creature at that.' For Augustine, the one known in the action of Israel's story is one ontological move away from God. Hereafter abbreviated *The Trinity*, book number and page.

²⁰ *ST I*, 47-48.

a revelation of God's self, because it is God himself who is active and identified by and with the narrated events.²¹

II.2 Temporal Actuality

Because Israel's scriptures narrate the acts of God, which identify God, they are stories that are located and limited temporally. Jenson contrasts this realistic narrative style with the basic style of myths. Most basically, myths recur and so never need to have actually occurred. As a result, 'deity is not invested in temporal events but is rather established in immunity to them, for in the myths the identifying actuality of the god happens at no time and at all times.'²² In the opposite way, Israel's stories are of particular events in the past that have opened up the possibility of the present and press towards a particular future. This is the case as these stories narrate a history that is driven by a promised end; past events fulfilled promises and push on to other promises that have a specific end. In this way, the future, present, and past are connected through the promise of God's presence and action and the actuality of God's faithfulness. Most importantly, for Jenson, these plotted events narrated as Israel's story with God occurred in time and across time; in their temporal actuality these events make God temporally identifiable.²³

Jenson's suggestion that God is temporally identifiable has two essential aspects. The first is that God is known as the God of Exodus and is so identified *by* this event. It is an event that witnesses beyond itself to the God that has liberated and

²¹ Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1997), 145ff, argues that Israel's most characteristic speech about God takes the form of full sentences where God is the subject of an active verb. God's action brings about new circumstance as God acts directly on the direct object and is so bound to that object. This is the 'core claim' of Israel's faith that God is graciously identified in asymmetrical relations to others who are thereby refused any sense of autonomy. According to Brueggemann all of Israel's reality is shaped by the hard won conviction that YHWH is 'named and palpably present in this world.' He claims that 'Yahweh is a known, nameable, and named character who lives Yahweh's own life according to Yahweh's own will and purpose.' By focussing on action and committing to a narrative portrayal of Yahweh Brueggemann is consciously following in the Old Testament theology tradition started by Gerhard von Rad. Jenson's understanding of the way promises and partial fulfilments that drive the biblical narrative picks up von Rad's approach as evidenced in *Old Testament Theology* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1962).

²² *ST I*, 48.

²³ *ST I*, 49.

liberates Israel. This event points beyond itself to the God who saves. Additionally and crucially, Jenson notes that the Exodus follows the promise to Abraham as the fulfilment of his commitment to bless the world through Abraham's offspring. As God is faithful through time in the giving and fulfilling of the promise, he is identified *with* the events that can be narrated. As a result, this event not only points to God as liberator, but to God as the one who has liberated this people, at this time, and is in this particular way as the faithful God of Israel. In short, the biblical God is not the God of timeless persistence or abstract freedom who generically saves. Nor is this God merely known by this event as one who exists in ineffable perfection beyond the world. Instead, he is the faithful God of Israel who makes promises and lives out his identity in time and through time. God is known because he is identified by particular events as one who is present with Israel in the full temporal actuality and contingency of its life.²⁴

In another context Jenson makes the same point about God's temporal identification. He explains that the Lord 'is identified *with* Israel in that he is identified *as* a participant *in* Israel's story with him.'²⁵ For Israel, there is no other God behind this God, no other God above this God, or like this God. As a result, Israel confesses and hopes that the one who has been a participant in Israel's history will continue to be. According to Jenson, it is this hope and expectation of God's faithfulness that allows this people to make sense of their history in all its discontinuity. It is the possibility of God's actual presence that allows Israel to portray God as one in his faithfulness through this history not one beyond or above it.²⁶ This past given and this hope maintained Israel's scriptures assume that God can be truly identified as the one known *by* and *with* this people and the story that narrates their shared history²⁷ Within this history and the narration of these events, the way of

²⁴ Alan Torrance, 'Jesus in Christian doctrine' in *The Cambridge Companion to Jesus*, ed. Markus Bockmuehl (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 204, makes a similar point in relation to Athanasius, the Arians, and the plausibility of God-talk. He argues that 'knowledge of God is not mediated *by* Jesus, unless, first, he is identified *with* the being of God.' [emphasis added] Both aspects, according to Torrance, must be true if our theology is to avoid the character of mythological projection.

²⁵ ST I, 77.

²⁶ ST I, 64.

²⁷ Jenson's understanding of God's presence as presence with Israel is primarily but not exclusively focussed in categories of time and presence in time and through time. The contemporary Jewish theologian Michael Wyschogrod has made a similar

the God of Israel is clarified as participation in creation that is free, gracious, enlivening.

III. The Centrality of Temporal Identification

In the conclusion of 'The Identification of God,' Jenson asserts that the whole argument of the work depends on the move just noted: that God is identified *by* and *with* particular temporal events. He offers a simple and direct justification of this claim: 'were God identified by Israel's Exodus or Jesus' Resurrection, without being identified *with* them, the identification would be a revelation ontologically other than God himself.'²⁸ If God is not actually present in and throughout the events *by* which he is identified, then he is not truly known. Because Israel confesses that God is just so present and tells stories that narrate this active presence, the basic assumption of Israel's scripture is that God is identified *by* the events of Israel's story and *with* these events. As a result of this, Israel assumes and Jenson asserts that God's acts reveal God because God is an agent involved and identified in time and across time. Because of this real presence, God is known and truly revealed as he freely determines and identifies himself in and through his action. God's acts are his self-revelation determined by his free choice to be with and for Israel. The reality of God's being is not other than he is in these self-revealing acts. God is as he chooses to be and as he lives out that choice. As a result, God's acts make God known, not merely the possibility of knowledge of God.

These seem to be, for Jenson, the only two epistemological options. Consequently, he argues that revelation is either God's self-introduction or the event that initiates a quest for the divine. If revelation is a self-introduction, then God is truly identified by and with the event of his revealing because he introduces himself as he is personally present to his creatures. If not, then he is known only by this event

argument through the categories of space. Wyschogrod argues that one of the central mysteries and tenets of the Jewish faith is the belief that God is spatially and truly present with his people Israel. This takes the form of God's name being present in the temple as well as his presence being *in* the people. For Wyschogrod, Israel embodies God's presence to the world as God indwells his people and so is present in creation. See Michael Wyschogrod, 'Incarnation,' *Pro Ecclesia* vol. 2, no. 2, 209-215. See also, Michael Wyschogrod, *The Body of Faith: Judaism as Corporeal Election* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1983).

²⁸ *ST* I, 59.

as it is a pointer to deity. In this situation, God is introduced and witnessed to by one who is other than and so distant from God. Therefore, God is either known directly in his action as he is in his eternity or there is an ontological and consequent epistemological breach that we must cross through our religious or rational capacities. Again, revelation is either a making known or it is a step that makes knowledge possible. The critical question, for Jenson, is whether we know God as the personally active agent of the Exodus and Resurrection or whether these events are only clues to our knowledge of God. Are these clues created effects and so simply signs by which we transcend the limitations of temporality to timeless eternity? If so, are we dependant on an image metaphysic, the proper use of analogy, or the dialectic of eternity and time to truly know the God of the Bible? Or, do we, in hearing about the events of Exodus and Resurrection, hear of God as he is in his actual existence?

For Jenson, the former pattern of indirection is the typical pattern of religion. Of this pattern he writes, 'where deity reveals itself is not where it is. At Delphi, one hears Apollo's voice but does not meet him; indeed the very notion of meeting Apollo in his own guise would have been oxymoronic.'²⁹ Does the same follow for Moses in his encounter with YHWH on Sinai? Or, is God's presence on Sinai a self-introduction that confirms and expands his previous introduction at the burning bush? Is it oxymoronic to think that in meeting Jesus before and after his death that the apostles actually met God? Is doubting Thomas' confession merely Johannine hyperbole? Or, is it a description called forth by the reality of the one that had been and is again personally present?

III.1 An Initial Meeting

In a rather simple way it does not appear that God's meetings with Moses on Sinai are described as oxymoronic encounters.³⁰ Instead, they are described as frightening and formidable occasions in which the real presence of God makes the mountain holy. Here, as in the rest of the Old Testament, there is unmistakable deference used in

²⁹ *ST I*, 59.

³⁰ The 'Theophanies at Sinai', as described in Exodus 19:1-25, 20:18-21, and 34:5-7, suggest that 'Moses went up to God,' that 'God called to him from the mountain,' and that 'Moses approached the thick cloud where God was.' Whether the Lord dwells on Sinai or whether he merely descends onto the mountain it is clear that he 'stands with him there.' (34:5)

describing God's presence and action to and for Israel. This deference seems to exalt God and shroud him in a cloud of mystery and unapproachable glory. However, this is never due to any conception of an ontological necessity that would separate God from the glory of his presence. YHWH is present with Moses on Sinai, even if Moses cannot encounter God face to face. It is not that the Lord is actually somewhere else, as is the case with Apollo. YHWH, the compassionate and gracious God, is there and the fullness and holiness of his being is, in fact, the problem (for Moses, not for God).

On closer examination, it is clear that Exodus 34:5-7 narrates this passing of God, in which the Lord speaks of his character and history, as an event in which God is present and present to make himself known.³¹ This making known is a self-introduction or re-introduction that takes place in the context of a real meeting. In this personal encounter God expounds on his previously given name and demonstrated character. In so meeting Moses on Sinai God is present and promises to be present with his people; his appearance reiterates and reinforces the promise he made to Moses from the burning bush. This meeting of the free and gracious God with his people is direct just as it is dangerous. God is revealed in his act of coming to Moses and is revealed as the one who saves, commands, and continues on with his people. There is no other god that Moses can or needs to encounter to know the divine nature, substance, or essence. In a sense, this meeting of the Lord with Moses is like an encounter with any personal being; there is revealing and concealing, there is knowing and still more to be known³². In revelation there is a real giving of God's

³¹ Brevard Childs, *The Book of Exodus: A Critical, Theological Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster Press, 1974), 340-384 and 601ff, succinctly covers the historical-critical issues related to the Sinai narrative while offering an interesting survey of the history of exegesis; he concludes that Exodus 19 remains as a witness that God did enter a covenant with a historical people at a particular time and place. (384)

³² Colin Gunton, *Act and Being* (London: SCM Press, 2002), 95, makes a helpful clarification about the nature of our knowledge of God. By distinguishing the way in which our definitions of God's character are open, as opposed to complete or merely attributive, he explains that as we know God and can list his salient characteristics we know that there is more to God and his mysterious personal existence that eludes our definition. Later, he explains that we 'cannot have a full rational account of or define finally in conceptual terms what it is for God to be God...Nor can one have an inside view of God, to (now) know God by direct vision... God is incomprehensible in not being graspable; but not incomprehensible in the sense of being entirely beyond our understanding. He can and does give himself to be conceived by us.' (111-112)

self that is truly revealing, even if there is more of God than can be known due to human sinfulness or capacity.

III.2 The Ultimate and Determinate Meeting

According to Jenson, the Incarnation should clarify this point of God's presence and temporal actuality past evasion. In Christ, God is present in the world as this one man. God is not only made known by this one but is with this one in the full plot and passing of his life since he is God. As the prologue of John makes clear, the light shines in the world (1:5), which came to being through the light (1:10). Moreover, this shining can be described as dwelling among us (1:14). What the prologue states curtly and poetically the rest of the narrative elucidates: God is present, incarnate and living as the Son of Man and the Son of God. Throughout the gospel of John, God is identified with Jesus because his life is the revelation of his Father's will, love, and judgement. Recognizing this way of being involved and present both follows from and fully enlightens God's way of being present with and for Israel. The Incarnation enlightens the full actuality of God's temporal involvement that in turn enlightens the possibility of God's identification by and with Israel. In both cases God the Father is freely identified in his real relations with others in creation.

Effectively, the incarnate Lord is the one *by* whom and *with* whom God is known. Jenson nuances this primary point by noting that the presupposition of the Incarnation is the identification of God as the agent of Exodus. The presupposition of the Incarnation and the plausibility of the Resurrection is the past action of God. By so rooting the doctrine of God in the Old Testament, Jenson attempts to make God's revelation in Christ consistent with 'the way of God's identity.' If God is the God of Exodus and is temporally identifiable, then the Incarnation is not an act counter to God's timeless nature. Again, the way of God's relating to the world is not radically and paradoxically transgressed in the Incarnation. Instead, it is fulfilled, embodied, and at once perfected. Seen within this conceptual nexus of assumptions, God's relatedness in Christ is not in contradiction to his perfect and eternal way of being. Instead, God is the God who promised to be with and for Israel and is so in the Exodus and is so again in the Incarnation.

In sum, the events of Exodus and Resurrection are events that identify God and clarify his way with and in creation. The narration of these events describes God

as active and present in a specific time and place to encounter his people. These events are not the places from which God's people begin a quest to encounter God or enter God's presence. Of this Jenson writes, 'the revelation to Israel and church calls this quest idolatry, the first and fundamental sin. Just thereby, it claims to be not a pointer to deity but God's personal self introduction: "I am the Lord your God." God is not only identified by Exodus and Resurrection; he is identified with them.'³³ If it is not so, then we are dependant on something other than God's action and the story of God's history with us to make God known. If it is not so, we must develop rules and ways of interpretation to correctly understand how God is known. In other words, if God's being is only identified by this story, then revelation merely enables a faithful ascent to God.

It is this dismissing of the biblical story that is most troubling from Jenson's perspective. For Jenson, the biblical narrative is the one story of God's journey with us by and with which he makes himself known to us. It is not a story of our wandering away from and back to him, nor is it a story told to enable a transcending up into his timeless eternity. Instead, it is the story of God's faithful love for his people in which God graciously goes with us and comes to us.³⁴ God is not the one God beyond the events of time and the timed events of this story. He is the one identified by and with the particular events of the Exodus and Resurrection as the triune God. For Jenson, this is so because 'the doctrine of the Trinity is but a conceptually developed and sustained insistence that God himself is identified by and with the particular plotted sequence of events that make the narrative of Israel and her Christ.'³⁵ By focussing on the way of God's identity in the Old Testament, the context is set to understand the Incarnation and the identification of God by the Resurrection. It is so as the way of God's temporal involvement is recognized and the corresponding hopes that this creates are made clear in their fulfilment.

³³ *ST I*, 60.

³⁴ Jenson, *ST I*, 60 n102, in a characteristically cogent note, explains that it is the recognition of this persistent presence that determines the shape of his *Systematic Theology* in which the doctrine of God includes the doctrines of Christ and the Spirit. His aim in this is to allow the full biblical story to shape the doctrine of God and to allow these doctrines to be about God himself with us and for us. In contrasting this to classical models he explains that 'both Thomas Aquinas and the classic Protestants conceptually presuppose and explicitly trace the narrative of God's works. But both begin the narrative ordering only after the doctrine of God is complete; the journey they then describe is humanity's journey from and to God.'

³⁵ *ST I*, 60.

IV. A Critical Dependence

To clarify the claim that God is identified by and with Jesus Christ, Jenson critically appropriates and expands a basic set of arguments made by Karl Barth.³⁶ According to Jenson, Barth perfected modernity's critique of religion by attacking the distinction between God and his revelation in Christ. Following this critique Barth radically reoriented theology by reminding theologians of their primary task: 'to identify the *theos* in "theology."' ³⁷ The key to Barth's project, in its critical phase and in its constructive flourishing, is, according to Jenson, his resistance to separating the form and content of revelation.³⁸ From this insight Barth elucidated the logic of revelation and so argued for the necessity of a Trinitarian framework in worship, proclamation and theology. Practically, Jenson claims that from Barth 'twentieth-century theology has relearned that this doctrine has and must have explanatory and regulatory use in the whole of theology, that it is not a separate puzzle to be solved but the framework within which all theology's puzzles are to be solved.'³⁹

IV.1 Karl Barth and the Event of Revelation

According to Jenson, Barth derives and uses the doctrine of the Trinity in a certain way. Beginning with God's act of self-revelation, Barth attempts to secure our knowledge of God and describe God's freedom as his Trinitarian existence. Most basically, for Barth, we know God as he exists and is because 'God is who he is in the act of his revelation.'⁴⁰ In the event of revelation our knowledge of God is secured by

³⁶ For a full development of this dependence, see *God after God: The God of the Past and the God of the Future, Seen in the Work of Karl Barth* (Indianapolis and New York: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1969). Hereafter abbreviated, *God after God*, page number.

³⁷ ST/1, 60.

³⁸ Robert Jenson, 'Karl Barth' in *The Modern Theologians*, ed David Ford (Oxford: Blackwells, 1997), 33.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* vol. 2 part 1: *The Doctrine of God* eds. G.W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1957), 262. Hereafter abbreviated *C.D.*, volume and page. Colin Gunton summarizes this coming together; he explains that Barth determined to identify God from and in his acts so that 'God is

God's action and presence, which reveals his triune reality. This is seen most definitely and determinatively, for Barth, in the one life of Jesus from his birth to his death and resurrection.⁴¹ This one act, which is inseparable from God's being, reveals the reality of God; not just his reality *pro nobis*, but 'his inner, proper reality, behind which and above which there is no other.'⁴² In effect, this one life is the revelation of God as God's Word because God chooses for it to be and so it is. As this one life is determined by God's perfection in his will, act, and being, it is the life of the true person beyond whom there is no transcending.⁴³

These critical aspects of event, decision, freedom and personhood come together when Barth explains that the heart and limit of the dogmatic act is the confession that God *is*.⁴⁴ For Barth, this single word is the starting point and foundation for all our words in the church. It is where we begin and where we end in response to God's self-revelation as Lord. Within this sphere the truthfulness of all our words depends on God's action and the insight that God is the absolute subject who alone makes himself known. Therefore, we can speak truly about God only when we speak about the one who saves us as our Lord and meets us in absolute sovereignty. This unsurpassable Lord encounters us, gives himself to be an object of our knowledge and judges all our sinful attempts to define pure and true being. In this

what he does, and does what he is.' See Colin Gunton, *Act and Being* (London, SCM Press, 2002), 76.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Eberhard Jüngel, *God's Being is in Becoming: The Trinitarian Theology of Karl Barth*, trans. John Webster (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 2001), 13-53, makes the same point about the concept of revelation in the *Church Dogmatics*. Although Jüngel primarily focuses on Volume I/1 he notes that the aspects of event, decision, covenant of love, and absolute subjectivity are essentially important to the way in which revelation corresponds to God's eternally triune being. Because of this correspondence, God's triune acts are his acts of self-interpretation that reveal God as the subject, object, and predicate of revelation. Primally, God's being is the event of self-relatedness of the Father, Son, and Spirit. This relatedness is eternally the one eventful being of the triune God that Jüngel describes as 'being in movement.' This eventful relatedness of distinction in unity 'grounds' the movement of God's self-interpretation to humanity and makes this secondary movement truly revealing. Essentially, God corresponds to himself. Because God corresponds to himself in eventful relatedness that is characterized by free perichoretic movement, he can reveal himself in freedom and love as the absolute subject who truly encounters humanity. God's acts reveal God's self and so make this primary relatedness clear.

⁴⁴ CD II/1, 258.

way he makes himself known and unveils our attempt to secure our existence in autonomous actuality or irreverent neutrality.⁴⁵

In this rich section two of Barth's key insights come together: Barth's logic of revelation is clearly connected with his understanding of God's eventful essence. For example, Barth argues that the life of Jesus from his birth to his death and resurrection is the act that reveals his being. This is the case because 'God is He who in this event is subject, predicate, and object; the revealer, the act of revelation, and the revealed.'⁴⁶ Following this, Barth concludes that 'to its very deepest depths God's Godhead consists in the fact that it is an event...the event of his action, in which we have a share in God's revelation.'⁴⁷ This final word is also a starting point that requires more precise and concrete definition. Barth gives this concreteness and precision by suggesting that God is a person, who realises and unites its self.⁴⁸ God is the perfect person as he is self-moved and so free in Himself and by himself to make a conscious, willed, and executed decision to be God with and for us.⁴⁹ Barth further defines this specific event as the self-revelation of God's name: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.⁵⁰ Following this, Barth concludes that 'God is He who in His revelation seeks and creates fellowship with us, and who (because his revelation is self-revelation) does this in Himself and in His eternal essence.'⁵¹ Because God acts to make himself known and is himself in this act that reveals his being, we know God as the free and absolute Lord.

In *Alpha and Omega* and *God after God*, Jenson examines this core set of assumptions and arguments. He suggests that Barth moves theology forward by saying a few things about God and God's life with us in a radically direct and obvious way. First, Barth makes it clear that Jesus Christ is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and end of God's will. Jenson explains that for Barth 'the life of Jesus Christ, as God's life with and for unworthy man, is the only goal of history. The

⁴⁵ CD II/1, 262.

⁴⁶ CD II/1 262-263.

⁴⁷ CD II/1, 263.

⁴⁸ CD II/1, 267.

⁴⁹ CD II/1, 271.

⁵⁰ CD II/1, 273.

⁵¹ CD II/1, 274.

eternal will of God is His will that this life shall take place.'⁵² It follows from this supralapsarian position that everything else in creation is the means for this end and has its beginning and end in this person. Second, Barth makes it clear that Christ is the centre or the mid-point of history. More precisely, Jesus Christ is the centre of history as the history of God and man in his one person. In and through his description of this one person, Barth asserts that 'God himself is the pre-eminently historical being; His being and doing are identical.'⁵³ From these two points the third follows: that all things exist and so have being as they play a part in Jesus Christ's life story.⁵⁴

Affirming and appropriating Barth's insights, Jenson draws a conclusion that determines the trajectory of his theology: there is no going back behind God's self-revelation to think of God's will for creation and humanity in abstraction from God's action that reveals his being. Once this is recognized and confessed, there is no going beyond God's eventful essence because God's acts reveal his personal being in its infinite freedom and love. Because Christ reveals God and God's way of being, his one life must be the beginning and end of all our reflection and the criterion by which such reflection is judged. This trinitarian logic creates a tight connection between revelation, the being of God, the persons of God, and the name of God. As Jenson explains this leads to the specific task of developing a Christological ontology: 'we must work out a vision of our life and the world we live it in which will be an explanation of the Gospel's concrete meaning for the understanding of existence.'⁵⁵ A central contention of this thesis is that this nexus of assumptions and theological commitments forms the necessary context for understanding Jenson's identification of God. Jenson's trinitarian description and theological ontology follow from the Barthian and thoroughly orthodox assertion that Jesus is the Logos of God's acts and being because both are perfectly united in God's triune reality.

⁵² Robert Jenson, *Alpha and Omega: A Study in the Theology of Karl Barth* (New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1963), 168-9. Hereafter abbreviated, *Alpha and Omega*, page.

⁵³ *Alpha and Omega*, 169.

⁵⁴ *Alpha and Omega*, 170.

⁵⁵ *Alpha and Omega*, 171.

IV.2 Jenson's Standing Critique of Barth

Jenson tries to identify and describe the triune God in response to revelation and in turn develop a Christological ontology. To do both he follows Karl Barth but not as the only master; his allegiance is moderated by a nagging concern: that Barth says all this about Jesus' life and history analogously. According to Jenson, this opens the possibility that the real history of the triune God is above and beyond this man's life in Palestine. This possibility comes about as Barth 'distinguishes very clearly between God's eternal history and temporal history,' and ultimately correlates the temporal history of Jesus Christ to the eternal history of Jesus Christ. This is not to say that Barth separates the eternal decree and Jesus' earthly history; instead, the eternal determines the temporal as the ground, basis, and inner circle of the outer circumference. In effect, Barth works with a strong distinction between God's economic and immanent actualities and prioritizes the immanent as the determining reality in God that is known through the economic; the two are drawn together in a synthetic relation of identity that is comparable to the two natures of Christ. For Jenson this 'puts [Barth] in danger of removing reconciliation itself, the inner reality of Jesus' life, from our history.'⁵⁶ Although Barth begins with the life of Jesus, including his birth, death, and resurrection, he secures God's freedom by focusing on the pre-temporal actuality of the Father, Son, and Spirit. As a result, he risks making the life of Jesus a mere correspondence to the Son's eternal actuality. If the Son's life with the Father is revealed in the life of Jesus as something other than or more than this historical life, then Barth's radical claims about the revelatory character of Jesus' life and history are modulated and the previously described trinitarian logic is made ambiguous.

Jenson expresses this same concern in *God after God*. He explains that 'the difficulty is in the way that Barth reckons with God's transcendence.'⁵⁷ This comes about as the two sides of Barth's dialectic between time and eternity are expressed absolutely with respect to Christ and the Trinity. Jenson recognizes that 'he wants to say that God is in fact what happens with Christ...But he also wants to proclaim the freedom and transcendence of God over against what he is for and with us. He thinks to do this he must postulate a reality of God in himself distinct from God-for-us...All

⁵⁶ *Alpha and Omega*, 163.

⁵⁷ *God after God*, 153.

that we are to say of God in himself is that revelation is his image.'⁵⁸ For Jenson this can only mean one of two things: that there is real identity between the image and the prototype or there is a real difference. He suggests that 'either the introduction of analogy adds nothing at all to the fundamental claim that God could have been God otherwise than as God in and for *our* time, or what it indicates as the condition of his freedom must be a mode of being other than temporality.'⁵⁹ Essentially, Jenson is worried that the introduction of analogy qualifies the claim that Christ's life reveals God. More pointedly, he is concerned that this introduces a qualification into the confession that this one is God as the Son whose historical actuality determines the being of God.

Jenson recognizes that Barth's use of analogy is between relations, between the Father and the Son, that it is as such active and suggests a correspondence between two events specified as language events. Nevertheless, he suggests that it does not make the necessary move to 'sustain the dialectic to the end as a *temporal* dialectic.'⁶⁰ In other words, Barth fails to understand the difference between eternity and created temporality as the unity and distinction of two different times or temporal sequences. Although Barth describes eternity as a pure duration that is not sheer timelessness, he does not understand God's transcendence as determined by the life of Jesus of Nazareth. Instead, he relates analogously an eternal event to this person's temporal history. Consequently, one becomes the echo of the other.⁶¹ As a result, God's revelation is an event of correspondence that imitates and repeats the eternal meeting of God with man in the temporal history of this same man.⁶²

IV.3 A Standing Suggestion for a Way Forward

With this critique in mind, Jenson attempts to move forward by critically appropriating Barth's basic insight into the relation between the Trinity, revelation, and the divine nature. In *God after God*, Jenson makes a suggestion about the way that this should be done: 'we will understand God's freedom over against what he is

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ *God after God*, 154

⁶¹ *God after God*, 155

⁶² Ibid.

for and with us as his futurity to what he already is with and for us.’⁶³ He also suggests that the category of conversation is the means by which God’s threefold continuity in and through time must be developed. As such, Jenson suggests that God is a Word or a hermeneutic event. His triune actuality is therefore to be understood as the speaking and response of a language event or, more specifically, the ongoing conversation between the Father, Son, and Spirit, the nature of which is determined by the dynamics of Jesus’ life. Whereas Barth grounds God’s being and the actuality of God’s acts in the freedom of pre-temporal perfection, Jenson begins with the acts of God and grounds their freedom in God’s immanent futurity. This could mean that God is only complete in himself when the totality of God’s history and created history is finalized. It could also mean that God is in himself freely, but truly determined by what will be and already is. This latter option entails a notion of being-in-anticipation that can accommodate the freedom of God’s action and the perfection of his temporal actuality. In this perfection the past, present and future of God are distinct but not distant from each other. This could be developed in several different ways.

Jenson begins to develop this type of logic by describing Jesus in his history as God and the revelation of God. As a result, Jenson ‘seek(s) to describe God’s will-its eternity undiminished-as an event in history, as the chronologically and geographically fixable event of the life of Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ.’⁶⁴ This means that the eternity of God is actual in and through the occurrence of Jesus Christ’s life. By describing Jesus as God, it is possible to describe the history of this person and the eternity of God without confusing eternity and created temporality. In addition, it is possible to describe the history of all things or the meaning of all things by telling this person’s story as the final truth about God. This depends on the proposition that statements about this one in his temporal actuality identify God and so display the logic of God’s being as they operate in the material mode. This is according to Jenson the function of the classical doctrine of the Trinity. He explains that ‘the doctrine asserts that God in himself is *in fact* not other than he is in his

⁶³ *God after God*, 155; Jenson continues, ‘and since Barth is indeed right in seeing God’s freedom as one side of his deity, we will define God’s deity as his futurity to himself and so to us.’ A question that appears at this point is what is the other side; what along with freedom constitutes God’s deity, what is included in futurity if it is not pure and absolute futurity?

⁶⁴ *Alpha and Omega*, 163

history among us...*Therefore*, says the doctrine of Trinity, we will speak falsely of God if we speak of him otherwise than as we speak of him in telling this story.'⁶⁵

In these sentences the two emphasised words 'in fact,' state the matter abruptly and can serve to summarize this contrast as Jenson takes it up in his *Systematic Theology*. God is *in fact* not different than he is in his history with us, because, according to Jenson this history is *in fact* his. It does not reveal something else or some other event that is the reality of God's life before or beyond this historical existence; instead, it reveals the identity of the Son in his relations to the Father and the Spirit. As such, self-revelation is not self-interpretation, but is a personal self-introduction. God introduces himself to us as our Father because he is identified by and with his only begotten Son, Jesus Christ. Therefore, if we define God's freedom or his being in abstraction from the one life of the Son of God, which in fact includes his birth, death and resurrection, our description of God obscures his actuality with us and for us and with and for himself. This life makes the Father and Spirit known because the Father is in the Son and the Spirit enlivens his coming; it does not reveal the life and decision and reality of another Son or another history.

Once this critical difference between Jenson and Barth is noted and appreciated, it is possible to see the way that Jenson expands the logic of Barth's identification of God. This happens as he interprets the Exodus and the Eschaton as events dramatically related to the Resurrection. Basically, Jenson understands the Resurrection as the fulfilment of the Exodus or the verification of the promise that the Exodus both enacts and partially fulfills. As God promised his faithfulness to Abraham, so he lives out that faithfulness in the Exodus. This is a fulfilment that looks back to the promise of the land and leads on to the promise of the kingdom. In this history that God freely chooses and is, the Father, Son, and Spirit are identified as God because they are identified by and with each other. When Jenson identifies these three as God, the logic of God's triunity is determined by the totality of this history.

⁶⁵ ST I, 19

V. Temporal Identification and God's Hypostatic Being

By noting the triune God's way of being, Jenson hopes to clarify how God is God. This is seen clearly, according to Jenson, in the life and person of Jesus Christ who lives as God with God. This acknowledgment and confession is made more precise by Jenson's recognition of the way of God in creation in relation to Israel in the Exodus. In both contexts, Jenson is trying to argue that this way of being with and for Israel and being identified with and by Israel displays God's hypostatic being. For Jenson, it is one of the critical insights of all theology that God has a particular way of being that is personal. Clarification of this must begin with the assertion that God acts in time as a settled agent in Israel's story and continue with Christological reflection. In both contexts it is essential to recognize who God is and how God is free in his action for and with us. Within Jenson's theology, these core convictions are confirmed by a strong conception of hypostatic being or identifiable particularity that makes clear how God is personal and three persons.

No one in the contemporary context has argued for this critical insight into the personal nature of God's existence more forcefully or effectively than John Zizioulas. To be concise, I will begin by simply listing several of Zizioulas' basic conclusions that relate to the way God is personal:

1. theological ontology, that is reflection on how God *is* triune, is the central problem that must be solved to think rightly about God, the church, human existence, and the world;⁶⁶
2. the concept of the person as developed in the trinitarian controversy allowed the Fathers to solve this problem by distinguishing the three persons of God and thinking rightly of the triune God's one *ousia* as it is constituted by the persons and pre-eminently by the person of the Father;⁶⁷
3. what the Fathers made clear in the process is that persons are ontologically basic; therefore, the being of God is nothing other than the communion of these three by which the persons are constituted, differentiated, and united.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion, Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1997), 16. Hereafter abbreviated *Being as Communion*, and page.

⁶⁷ *Being as Communion*, 17-18.

⁶⁸ *Being as Communion*, 39.

According to Zizioulas, personhood is not a capacity or something individually possessed. It is not something in you, me, the Father, or the Spirit. Instead, it is something actual as a mode of existence. This mode of existence is defined as being in relationship with other persons. The circularity is inescapable and that is the point: persons are persons with persons. Colin Gunton's summary is cogent and reminds us of the theological implications of this; he explains that 'the being of God consists in the community of *hypostaseis* who give and receive their reality to and from one another.'⁶⁹

Zizioulas' insights are essentially a reinterpretation or explanation of the thought of the Cappadocians. To think through the relationship between the persons and the being of God, Jenson appropriates these same insights to develop his understanding of God's hypostatic being. In his terms personhood is a metaphysically deep concept; 'it is not an aspect of God's being but is rather correlated to the three who live deity.'⁷⁰ Consequently, for Jenson, it is divine personhood, not divine being, that is metaphysically primary.⁷¹ This distinction can be made clear by a contrast between Augustine and one Cappadocian divine, Gregory of Nyssa.

V.1 A Clarifying Comparison

For Jenson, the Cappadocians and Augustine are all faithful theologians who in their different ways defended Nicea and developed complex systems of thought in relation to their common confession.⁷² Despite this shared characteristic, context, and task,

⁶⁹ Colin Gunton, *Promise of Trinitarian Theology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997) 94.

⁷⁰ *ST* II, 95.

⁷¹ *ST* II, 96.

⁷² In a series of recent articles Michel Rene Barnes has mounted a serious attack on such comparisons. He argues in 'The Use of Augustine in Contemporary Trinitarian Theology', *Theological Studies* vol. 56 (1995), 237-51 and 'De Regnon Reconsidered', *Augustinian Studies*, vol. 26 (1995), 51-79, that the basic paradigm of East versus West that pits the 'Cappadocians' over and against Augustine is deeply flawed. He blames this reductive contrast on a simplistic reading of 'the Cappadocians' and Augustine that overlooks their close connections due to the shared post-Nicene context, Anti-Arian polemical task, and the sympathetic traditions of Alexandria and Rome. Barnes notes that most contrasts between Augustine and 'the Cappadocians' rely on general narrative of an idealist sort and focus on presuppositions instead of close readings of particular texts set within context. Barnes also argues that Augustine has been misread due to an over emphasizing of the importance of neo-platonic categories in his thought. According to Barnes, this

Jenson contrasts the Cappadocians and Augustine and argues that their theologies lead in radically different directions. It is not for Jenson a question of where the Cappadocians or Augustine begin,⁷³ but where they end up as they try to articulate how God is triune. According to Jenson, they end up in truly different places with different conceptual frameworks and different explanations of God's triunity. For Jenson, this is significant because what is needed is a conceptual framework for understanding triune being and action that follows the trajectory of Nicea and emphasizes the hypostatic particularity of the Father, Son, and Spirit. Faithfulness here at this conceptual level is critical because, as Augustine notes, 'nowhere else is a mistake more dangerous, or the search more laborious, or discovery more advantageous.'⁷⁴

To support this contrast and conclusion it is helpful to compare Gregory of Nyssa and Augustine and the way they interpreted a particular text, I Corinthians 1:24. By looking at how Gregory and Augustine allow 1 Corinthians 1:24 to shape their conception of the divine nature, it is possible to see the different ways in which they understand the relationship of Father and Son with respect to the divine nature. Comparing their use of the divine name and their conception of triune action extends this contrast and Jenson's conclusion.

misreading under-emphasizes his dependence on the Latin Nicene tradition that focussed on the centrality of the Incarnation and the importance of the indivisible work of the Trinity. The critique of the simplistic paradigm granted, his narrative that sets Augustine within the Nicene tradition opens the possibility of judging Augustine against the standard of Nicea itself and asking whether his Trinitarian theology clarifies the confession of Father, Son, and Spirit. The approach of this section, that focuses on the interpretation of a particular verse and relates this to the broader tendency of thought within this shared context is therefore enabled in part by Barnes' 'grand narrative.'

⁷³ Barnes notes in 'Rereading Augustine on the Trinity' in *The Trinity : an interdisciplinary symposium on the Trinity* ed. Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall, Gerald O'Collins. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) 145-178, that de Regnon's grand scheme guides most readings of Augustine and 'the Cappadocians'. This grand narrative is aptly summarized: 'western theology begins with divine unity while eastern Trinitarian theology begins with divine diversity.'

⁷⁴ Augustine, *The Trinity* I, 68.

V.2 Augustine and the Logic of Individual Predication

To defend the catholic confession and explain the unity of the Trinity, Augustine provides a coherent logic to guide the way people think, believe, and speak about the triune God.⁷⁵ Practically, Augustine provides certain rules to guide speech about God so that terms, titles, and qualities might be properly used to describe the individual persons who each possess the divine nature. This logic of predication allows for each person to be described as truly and fully divine and so *homoousios*, but does not lead to enumeration because the divine nature is simple. Both the Arians and Augustine agree that if asymmetrically paired terms like father-son and begotten-unbegotten referred to the divine substance, then the Father and Son would be qualitatively and so ontologically differentiated. Therefore Augustine asserts that only what is said individually and identically is said substance-wise of deity.⁷⁶ Other terms and titles like Father and Son, begotten, word, and image are predicated by way of eternal relationship. These terms of distinction do not imply modification or predicate accidents to the divine nature because they describe eternal relations, which are neither accidental nor substantial.

Having made this argument, Augustine recognizes that Paul's description of Christ in 1 Corinthians 1:24 as the wisdom and power of God contradicts this way of speaking of God. It does so because it predicates a quality of deity relationally, not substantially. Paul's description of the Son and the Father's wisdom seems to violate Augustine's rules of predication and the logic that secures the rule. This apparent problem is heightened by the fact that this verse has been used by the catholic tradition to assert that the Son is equal to the Father as the eternal wisdom of the Father, without whom the Father would be neither wise, a father, nor God. Augustine

⁷⁵*The Trinity* I, 67.

⁷⁶ In addition to individual substantial predication, Augustine briefly alludes to a form of substantial predication used of certain relational terms. These relational terms predicate relations of identical and equal relatedness. So, for example, neighbourliness or friendship could be predicated of the Father and the Son substantially because they are relationships of equal and exact relatedness. The Son would be as equally loving of the Father as the Father is of the Son in a relationship of perfect friendship. Thus both the Father and Son separately and equally could be called friend, and friendship could be predicated of the divine nature in the same way as wisdom. What is critical to note is that even here substantial predication requires identical and individual predication of a quality to the being of God. See *The Trinity* V, 193.

recognizes that this interpretation ‘forces us to say that God the Father is only wise by having the wisdom which he begot, and not by the Father being in himself very wisdom.’⁷⁷ Additionally, Augustine recognizes that this argument secures the equality of the Father and the Son because it implies that ‘the Father is only called in himself what he is called with reference to his Son.’⁷⁸ In effect, this verse and the orthodox interpretation directly contradict Augustine’s logic of theological discourse. He recognizes that if this other way of predication is true, ‘then it follows that whatever they are called with reference to themselves, neither is called without the other, that is, whatever they are called to indicate their substance they are called together.’⁷⁹ Ultimately, for Augustine the idea that God’s wisdom is his uttered word is simply implausible. More forcefully, he concludes that the ridiculous outcome of this way of mutual predication is ‘that when you say being you point not to being but to relationship.’⁸⁰

V.3 Gregory and the Logic of Ontological Dependence

The logic of mutual dependence, which Augustine attributes to the catholic tradition and rejects, is fully developed by Gregory of Nyssa in *Contra Eunomius*. In this lengthy treatise, the logic of Paul’s verse is given full reign to determine faith and understanding. This determining influence can be seen at a key point in Book II where Gregory is arguing for the full equality of the differentiated *hypostaseis*. At this point he asserts the full mutuality and unity of the Father and the Son. He writes,

For he who truly believes in the One sees in the one Him Who is completely united with Him in truth, deity, and essence and life and wisdom, and in all attributes whatsoever...For without the Son the Father has neither existence nor name, any more than the Powerful without Power, or the Wise without Wisdom.⁸¹

For Gregory, any conception of the Father without the Son, by whom he is powerful and with whom he is mutually God, is an evil illusion. This is so because any abstraction from this union of the Father and the Son necessarily denies the Father his being, his name, his wisdom and his power and so denies him ‘real existence.’ As

⁷⁷ Ibid, 206.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius*. trans. *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Book II. 4,.105. Hereafter abbreviated *Against Eunomius*, NPNF, Book, section, page.

this is the case for the Father, likewise it is true for the Son and the Spirit. Therefore, true faith, according to Gregory, transcends neither the names of Father, Son, and Spirit, nor the relations by which the three are differentiated. For Gregory, there is no one God understood separately, individually, or in singularity over and against the other two who are worshiped. This is so because there is absolutely no separating the Father from the Son who is the wisdom, truth, and power of the Father without whom the Father would not be God.⁸² In effect, individual predication, according to Gregory, is a logical impossibility when speaking about the Father, Son, and Spirit.⁸³

V.4 The Relevance of the Divine Name to the Divine Nature

The dependence and mutually determining existence of the three who constitute the one divine nature is, for Gregory, taught in the divine name. Of this given name of Father, Son, and Spirit, to which there is a need to cling, Gregory writes, 'each title understood in its natural sense becomes for the Christian a rule of truth and the law of piety.'⁸⁴ Not following this truth or this law inevitably leads to problems in understanding the unity and distinction of the triune nature. In his argument against Eunomius, he asserts that his opponent's wayward logic is determined by his attempt to transcend the name of Father, Son, and Spirit and the natural relations therein implied.⁸⁵ In effect, the names themselves reveal relations true to the divine being that eternally persist.

Following this rule of truth, Gregory concludes that 'we should believe on the Name of the Father, Son, and of the Holy Spirit. For the differentiation of the *hypostaseon* makes the distinction of the *proswpon* clear and free from confusion, while the one Name standing in the forefront of the declaration of Faith clearly

⁸² For Gregory, Augustine's statement that 'the name "Father" signifies only the Father in himself but the name "God" includes him and the Son and the Holy Spirit, because the one God is a trinity' would have seemed like an inversion of the logic that necessitates the doctrine.

⁸³ Augustine, *The Trinity* VI.9, writes 'it is not easy to see how you can talk of the Father alone or the Son alone, since the Father is always and inseparably with the Son.' Nevertheless, because his logic necessitates it, he continues to do so without offering substantial proof of how or why, except that the three can be differentiated but not enumerated and so are truly and fully known individually and separately.

⁸⁴ *Against Eunomius*, NPNF, II.2, 102.

⁸⁵ *Against Eunomius*, NPNF, I.14, 51.

expounds to us the unity of the persons.’⁸⁶ For Gregory, the names of Father and Son understood naturally imply distinction, relation, and dependence as well as absolute unity. The three really are three as distinct persons whose relations are internal to the one *ousia* of God. Understood in this way the title reinforces the logic of dependence and unity. The final judgement of Gregory is that the logic of the divine nature and the divine name are mutually implicating. The logic of mutuality is shaped by the logic of the divine name and vice versa. Both lead Gregory to the conclusion that there is eternal distinction without separation, and ineffable unity without confusion within the one divine nature.

As Augustine moves beyond the logic of mutuality and Paul’s description of God’s wisdom, so too he tends to move beyond the name of Father, Son, and Spirit. As might be expected Augustine moves on to a name that can be equally and exactly predicated of the three. Directly after rejecting the logic of mutuality in book VII, Augustine concludes that the Son is not Word in the same way that he is wisdom. He is by relationship Son, image, and Word, but is wisdom substance-wise.⁸⁷ Because he is and truly has existence, this one being is wise before and beyond the apparently secondary fact that he is Word or Son. Ultimately it seems that in Augustine’s rationale a clear and distinct preference exists for the title of wisdom over the concepts of word, image, and the names of relation like father and son.

In effect, Augustine is certain that the divine substance is wise. He is also willing to equate all the divine attributes to wisdom.⁸⁸ He is even willing to equate wisdom, God, and being and to ask, ‘So how then are we going to understand this wisdom, which God is, to be a triad.’⁸⁹ Taken together it is hard to see how this does not equate the divine nature with an abstract quality in which relations and names are irrelevant to the essential nature. Although Augustine would certainly be horrified by such a conclusion, his logic seems to press towards this end.⁹⁰

⁸⁶ *Against Eunomius*, NPNF, II.2, 103.

⁸⁷ *The Trinity* VII.3, 221.

⁸⁸ *The Trinity* VI.9, 211, XV.8-9, 401.

⁸⁹ *The Trinity* VX.9, 401.

⁹⁰ That this is true is played out in the tradition that follows Augustine; as typified by Anselm and perfected by Thomas Aquinas. This theistic tradition, which begins with divine simplicity, has been strongly critiqued by Alvin Plantinga and others. For Plantinga’s argument see *Does God Have a Nature?* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 1980). For an introduction to and defence of divine simplicity see Elenore Stump ‘Simplicity’ in *A Companion to Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Quinn and

In conclusion, it seems that the language Augustine uses to confess that the Father, Son, and Spirit are distinct persons is ambiguously related to the true substance of God. In effect, Augustine's logic of absolute simplicity ultimately threatens to undercut his confessional language about the Father, Son, and Spirit. Although he confesses that the Father, Son, and Spirit are each fully God and are known as distinct and eternally related, his logic of absolute simplicity obfuscates how this can be so. This is due to the fact that it tends to make God's essence abstract, impersonal, and antithetical to distinction and relation. In the *Church Dogmatics*, Barth claims that in medieval scholasticism divine simplicity 'was exalted to the all controlling principle, the idol...devouring everything concrete.'⁹¹ From this judgement of reductionism, Barth exempts Augustine, who Barth claims was able to maintain a conception of simple multiplicity. Although Augustine hopes to do so in *The Trinity* I have argued that his logic undercuts his confession and reduces his language about the distinction between Father, Son, and Spirit to a tentative assertion. Although he attempts to explain this mystery, so that others do not have to rely on faith and scripture alone, he ends in humble confusion of frustration.⁹² He confesses that Father, Son, and Spirit are God but can not explain how or why; he can only point to a puzzle that is simply taken in faith as orthodox and Catholic.⁹³

In contrast to this trajectory of abstraction, the Cappadocians clarify the logic of Nicea by focussing on the three particular persons, taking the relations revealed in the names seriously, and rethinking the singularity of God's nature. Instead of

Taliaferro (Oxford: Blackwells, 1997), which also includes a good bibliography of related material.

⁹¹ *CD* 2/1, 329.

⁹² What makes *The Trinity* so difficult and complex is Augustine's belief in the triune God. In section after section he repeats the catholic teaching and asserts distinction in God while attempting to adhere faithfully to the confession of the three in one. However, he simply cannot understand this within the logic of abstracted, immutable, and simple being and so his attempt at clarification is ultimately confusing.

⁹³ In discussing the complex nature of Augustine's theological legacy, Jenson makes a very helpful comment in *ST* II, 29. He writes, 'Currently Augustine is vehemently defended against such critique as this by pointing to the trinitarian richness of his piety, as this appears in his sermons and commentaries and in such works as *De civitate Dei*, and as it indeed must be reckoned with in any general appreciation of his thought. The critique of Augustine that appears here and in volume 1 has strictly to do with his propositional teaching within certain realms of discourse, as these have in fact determined subsequent Western theology within those same realms. Augustine did unfortunately say the things that critics like me report, and what he said has had the ill consequences likewise reported, and we cannot honestly pretend otherwise.'

moving inward into the human soul, they move into the concrete relations of the Father, Son, and Spirit. Using their technical vocabulary that distinguishes between *hypostasis* and *ousia*, they were able to make a distinction between the three persons and the divine nature. They do so in a way that makes the persons constitutive of the nature and so includes the relationships of differentiation within the single being of the Godhead. Due to this crucial insight, that the persons and the relations belong to the one divine *ousia*, they avoid subordination and tritheism. In so doing, they develop a conception of hypostatic being that clarifies how each of the three are truly God in the full particularity of their equal *hypostaseis*.

V.5 An Active Consequence

The logic of the Cappadocians, as here attributed to Gregory of Nyssa, is truly different from a logic driven and secured by absolute simplicity. This real difference leads Augustine and Gregory to interpret I Corinthians 1:24 in very different ways. It also determines the way in which the divine name is related to the logic of God's triunity. Ultimately, this difference effects their interpretations of triune action. For both the Cappadocians and Augustine the works of God are indivisible as God is inseparably one. However, the way this unity and indivisibility is understood leads to truly different understandings of God's active relation to creation.

As Colin Gunton has argued, a deep ambiguity about God's activity in creation pervades Augustine's thought. This is due to Augustine's basic assumptions about time and deity that make certain statements about God in relation to creation problematically ambiguous.⁹⁴ This ambiguity results in an uncertainty about the substantial revelation of God's being in time and our consequent knowledge of God. Despite his drastic general assumptions, Augustine confesses that God is active in his creation and is so revealed as a trinity. Again, this happens in the context of a defence of the Catholic confession. Discussing the indivisibility of God's action *ad extra*, Augustine opens chapter two in Book I of *The Trinity* in response to a set of related questions. Those who do not understand the unity and indivisibility of triune action put these questions to the orthodox. For example, they want to know how the triune God acts inseparably if the Father alone speaks at Jesus' baptism, and the Spirit alone

⁹⁴ Colin Gunton, 'Augustine, The Trinity and the Theological Crisis of the West', *Scottish Journal of Theology* vol. 43, 36-41.

descends on the Son who alone is baptised. Augustine explains that these interrogators essentially want to know how each action is caused by the three if the Father, Son, or Spirit acts distinctly. Is it not the case that each does its own thing if they act distinctly and differently instead of identically?

In response to the specific question of causality, Augustine implies that the matter of differentiated action itself is a puzzle with only two apparent solutions: either the three act identically or differently. As a result the particular action of any of the three could be understood as an action of any of the three or of all three together.⁹⁵ Concerning this Augustinian puzzle, Edmund Hill writes, 'It is because of this absolute identity of God's substance with his attributes and with his actions, that we cannot distinguish the divine persons either in terms of divine attributes or in terms of divine actions.'⁹⁶ Hill asserts that this is 'a basic axiom of Trinitarian theology.'⁹⁷ At exactly this point it is appropriate to ask a question along with Augustine. In Book XV Augustine asks, "If, then, the Trinity itself and the persons of the Trinity singly can all be said to be (whatever God is), where or how will triunity be manifest?" We can add to this a second question, where or how will triunity be manifest if whatever God does can be said identically of each and every person of the Trinity?

Taken together these two questions pin-point the problem that faces any conception of absolute simplicity strictly applied to the biblical God. God is active in a perfectly personal way in creation. Through this God's being is made known in the unity of the action that reveals the three distinct and differentiated persons of the Trinity. Affirming a conception of exact identification in act following from an exact identification of being ultimately denies the ontological distinctions between the persons that made the doctrine of the Trinity necessary.

For Jenson, this strict Augustinian logic that follows from a doctrine of divine simplicity finally bankrupts the doctrine of the Trinity. It does so because it implies that there is no necessary connection between 'what differentiates the triune identities in God and the structure of God's work in time.'⁹⁸ For Augustine, God is simple in

⁹⁵ This problem of predication and the doctrine of appropriation are at the heart of Karl Rahner's critique of the Augustinian tradition. See *The Trinity* tr. Joseph Donceel (New York: Crossroads, 1997).

⁹⁶ Edmund Hill, note 18, 92 of *The Trinity*. For examples of this logic that leads to indistinguishable action see Book II.23, pg. 114 and Book III.3, pg. 129.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ *ST* I, 112.

his attributes and in his relation to time and therefore is not distinguishable in time, in being, or in being active in time. The end result of this is a final separation of language about God 'from the only thing that made such language meaningful in the first place: the biblical narrative.'⁹⁹ Noting this divorce, Jenson concludes that the undeniable trajectory of Augustine's trinitarianism is a movement beyond narrative. It is so because it is a movement to immutability determined by a doctrine of divine simplicity. Of this determination and trajectory Jenson explains, 'what in this way undoes trinitarianism in Augustine's thinking is the old dissonance between the metaphysical principle of the Greeks and the story telling of the gospel.'¹⁰⁰ For Jenson, recognizing this foundational problem in the Western tradition requires a simple choice. The tradition must decide if the indivisible nature of God's work is due to the indivisible and *indistinguishable* nature of God's agency, or whether it is due to the indivisible and *mutual* agency of God's triunity. Is the Trinity active as the action of each is indistinguishably the action of all three? Or, is the Trinity active as each acts distinctly and indivisibly in perfect mutuality?

According to Jenson, choosing the latter option of mutuality and distinction means following something like the 'Cappadocian rule': 'all action that impacts the creature from God....begins with the Father and is actual through the Son and is perfected in the Holy Spirit. Therefore the attribution of the action is not divided among the plurality of actors.'¹⁰¹ It is true that in all of God's acts the Trinity is active, but not as the Trinity causes each person's distinctive act. Instead, each action is mutual due to the causality of the Father, the obedience of the Son, and the perfecting of the Spirit. In and through this mutual action the characteristic mode of being (*tropos hyparxeos*) of each particular person of God is revealed and the perfect mutuality of the one God is known. Just as was the case with Augustine, the rule of action follows the rule of being. Just so, the acts of God are indivisible because they are mutual acts. It is not that each person of the Trinity equally and exactly possesses a nature and so acts in an indistinguishable way. Instead, the Father, Son, and Spirit are active 'each in his triune role' that reveals the distinction in unity of the triune community.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Gregory of Nyssa, *Ad Ablus*, 125; quoted by Jenson, *ST I*, 110.

V.6 Concluding the Contrast

In this contrast I have tried to make several things clear:

1. that a real difference exists between the trinitarian frameworks of Augustine and one Cappadocian divine, Gregory of Nyssa;
2. that these differences have a significant impact on the most basic way that God's being is conceived;
3. that this relates directly to the way the persons are described in their personal diversity and essential unity, as illustrated in the relevance of the divine name;
4. and finally, that this has a direct and decisive impact on the way God's action in and in relation to creation is conceived.

As with the earlier discussion of Barth's basic insights, the connection between the nature of revelation as the act of God, the relation of this to the being of God, and the description of the persons of God and the name of God is made clear in this contrast. These differences given, it is essential to highlight the impact that this has on the way that Jenson describes the personal diversity of the Father, Son, and Spirit.

As I have argued, Jenson begins with the way of God's gracious relation to Israel to assert that God is identified by and with Israel as Israel's God. Central to this is the assertion that God is freely, but truly, identified by contingent events that are essential to his personal actuality. Given this way of being with and for creation, Jenson continues to describe the Father, Son, and Spirit as agents in the one God's real relation to his people. Within this description each person is identified by and with specific events and particular or characteristic ways of engaging creation and relating to the other two persons of God. Following the trajectory of the Cappadocians, Jenson identifies and describes each person in their distinctive actuality as persons who are mutually, but not identically, God. The Cappadocian rule, that 'all action that impacts the creature has its origin in the Father, is actual in the Son, and is perfected by the Spirit,' conceptualizes these differences and implies the unity of God's action. It also illustrates that the Father, Son, and Spirit are personally related and so personal in distinct and different ways that do not separate, but instead guarantee their essential relatedness. Most basically, Jenson describes Jesus, his Father, and the Spirit in a way that emphasizes their particular characteristics and resists the conclusion that these differences separate the persons.

The directness of describing the persons and thinking of the divine nature in light of these hypostatic descriptions depends upon this notion of mutuality. To prioritize the biblical description of the Father, Son, and Spirit in their personal diversity, Jenson needs a conceptual framework that can accommodate the gospel's oddity. This oddity has been tamed, according to Jenson, by our trinitarian propositions and the metaphysical frameworks within which we set these propositions. In reaction to this, Jenson tries to fight the perception that the doctrine of the Trinity necessarily reads an abstracting and foreign metaphysic back onto the simple biblical story while separating God's true being from his revealed being. This begins with appropriating the Cappadocians' basic insight in to the primal nature of the hypostases and the nature of God's being as communion. It continues as Jenson tries to use the Nicene tradition upon which this insight depends while critiquing the Cappadocians themselves. As such, the Nicene creeds play a central role in Jenson's theology. To this creed and its importance we will now turn to illustrate the odd description that Jenson appreciates and tries to use in his identification of the one God of the biblical narrative.

VI. The Confusion of Translation and an Essential Insight

The triune logic of the early church could remain implicit, according to Jenson, because the theology of the Old Testament was assumed.¹⁰² In the Jewish context, the interpretation of Jesus' life, death and resurrection was guided and controlled by a particular theology and the corresponding 'metaphysical' assumptions. Most importantly, Israel recognized God's way in creation as determined and enlightened through his identification by and with Israel. As a result, the mutual identification of Jesus with the God of Israel was essentially plausible, even if surprising and upsetting. As the gospel spread into other cultures these assumptions were no longer givens.¹⁰³ In fact, contradictory assumptions were adopted that discounted and

¹⁰² ST I, 91.

¹⁰³ Richard Norris, *God and World in Early Christian Theology* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1965), 3-4, explains that 'the message which (the early missionary church) preached and the language which it used bore the imprint of a particular cultural, historical, and religious source. Neither the hope whose fulfilment it announced nor the conceptions which made that hope significant were shared by the

dismissed Israel's way of identifying God. In effect, these foreign assumptions made the Church's identification of Jesus with God seem oxymoronic.

Most importantly, the Hellenistic world, into which the gospel spread, dismissed the biblical understanding of the positive and active relation of God with the world. This was due to the presupposition of other stories and a theology or philosophy that rationalized the logic of these stories and so developed a negative theology. In practice, this theology attempted to transcend the various available stories of divinity to form a unified conception of the divine nature beyond the pantheon of personal deities.¹⁰⁴ Colin Gunton explains that 'Greek philosophy begins as an attempt not only to reject the inadequate gods of popular belief but to provide a rational version of the ancient world-view those gods represent. It is a demythologization only as a translation.'¹⁰⁵

As a result of this trajectory of abstraction from narrative, experience, and all things material, deity was defined by the negation of temporal actuality. No act or event could identify God because God is what time is not; God, or so it was assumed, is the one truly spiritual or perfect being beyond time. As a result, the divine is described by qualities only negatively related to time and things in the world. In this context it is assumed that the God whom Jesus called Father is not actually the compassionate God of creation and Exodus who is slow to anger but is better described as the 'unoriginated', 'unutterable', 'immovable', 'impassible', 'inexpressible', 'invisible', 'unchangeable', 'unplaceable', 'immaterial', 'unnamable One.'¹⁰⁶ This divine being exists above and beyond the process of time and the

vast majority of peoples who inhabited the Mediterranean Basin. The very habits of mind which made such proclamation meaningful were lacking to them. The Jewish origins and orientation of Christian preaching meant that it was often as not busy supplying answers to questions which most people had never asked.'

¹⁰⁴ *Triune Identity*, 58. Both in *The Triune Identity* and in his *Systematic Theology* Jenson relies heavily on a particular understanding of Greek religion. For support of this characterization he cites Jane Harrison, *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion* (Cambridge University Press, 1903), chaps. 1,6,7 and Martin P. Nilsson, 'Die Griechen,' *Luhrbuch der Religions-geschichte*, ed Chantepie de la Saussaye (Tubingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1925) 2:281-417. For Jenson's argument it is also critical that this religious consensus was in crisis at the time of the gospels' translation. In support of this he cites critically the classic study of Hans Jonas, *Gnosis und spatantiker Geist* (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1954).

¹⁰⁵ Gunton, *Act and Being*, 6.

¹⁰⁶ This is a short list of divine qualities or perfections that Jenson gathers from Justin's writings. For complete citations see Robert Jenson, *The Triune Identity: God*

differentiating events that give particular being their characteristic uniqueness. As a consequence of this assumption, hypostatic being was essentially related to accidental deformity or inessential qualities. These accidental inessentials were thought to reside temporally in addition to general or real being. Therefore, what exists as substantial in any thing is what is generally possessed beyond individuation, beyond temporal identification, and so beyond the events of this world which can be narrated. In this sense, things within time have being as they are like the cause of the world or the ground of being that is outside of time and beyond all becoming.

It is typical for this type of contrast to lead to a dismissal of the Nicene tradition as a hellenization of the gospel. In this dogmatic narrative it is suggested that the critical element of the biblical framework is lost among foreign frameworks. Jenson avoids this modernist conclusion and suggests that '[the Fathers] laboured to evangelize their own antecedent Hellenism, and succeeded remarkably if not fully.'¹⁰⁷ The highpoint of this, for Jenson, is the development of the Nicene tradition, which includes the two creeds of 325 and 381 AD. The way that Jenson uses the Cappadocians puts a particular weight on this tradition in which they play a critical role. To appreciate this we need to make clear three things: first, what Jenson thinks Nicea overcame; second, what he thinks it asserts; and third, what more needs to be said.

VI.1 The Orthodox Solution to a False Paradox

For Jenson, the creed of Nicea is the critical clarifying point in the ecumenical tradition. This is because the Nicene Fathers rejected the controlling influence of an alien metaphysic that had been developed in Hellenistic culture and had been assumed in the dominant schools of theology. In brief, the councilior fathers subverted any conception of an unbridgeable, ontological divide between deity and humanity. This assumption of ontological distance between God and creation had forced Christian reflection towards modalism and subordinationism. Instead of the distant deity assumed by these two false compromises or accommodations, Christians confess that the Father, the one Lord Jesus Christ, and the Spirit are God. This metaphysical

according to the Gospel (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1992), pg 93. Hereafter abbreviated *Triune Identity*, page.

¹⁰⁷ *ST I*, 90.

reversal happened at Nicea as it was clarified that Jesus Christ is the one Lord who is one with God as the only begotten Son. This human person cannot be located on a scale of divine being somewhere between absolute being and unmitigated temporality. Instead, this person is with God, and his being with God is proper to the very being of God. As a result of this clarification, Jenson suggests that 'antiquity's struggle to overcome a supposed gulf between deity and time is discovered to be moot in light of the gospel.'¹⁰⁸ This insight is, according to Jenson, made clear by several points made in the creed of Nicea.

According to Jenson, the 'great material point' that the creed of Nicea makes is that Jesus is 'God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God'.¹⁰⁹ For Jenson, this unambiguous clarification places Jesus with the Father as God. It removes any doubt about his ontological status as a semi-divine or nearly divine being. The Son is not and cannot be conceived of as an ontological bridge between deity and humanity that is somehow neither the one nor the other.¹¹⁰ Along with this material point, Jenson emphasises the phrase 'only begotten, that is from the being of the Father.'¹¹¹ This phrase clarified that the only begotten Son is begotten from the being of the Father and is so equal in being with the Father. Moreover, his coming into being or his begetting is not something irrelevant to the Father's being, but is 'an occurrence in the Father's being.'¹¹² This anti-Arian clause picks up this insight and 'asserts exactly what the Arians most abhorred: eventful differentiation in God himself.'¹¹³ For Jenson, this phrase 'renounced the principle that deity is equivalent to uneventfulness, although this was hardly noticed except by outraged Arians, as it still is noticed by few.'¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁸ ST I, 103

¹⁰⁹ ST I, 102

¹¹⁰ This material point rejects the Arians attempts to make the Son a perfect creature that is somehow god, but not the true High God. As well it rejects Origin's mediating role for the Son. Jesus is not an image of the Son who is the perfect image of deity above and so hierarchically related to God. Instead, Jesus Christ, the one Lord, is God and is so truly and fully.

¹¹¹ ST I, 102; Jenson notes that this phrase does not appear in the "Nicene Creed," but focuses on its importance due to its historical decisive character and its dogmatic material significance.

¹¹² ST I, 102

¹¹³ ST I, 102

¹¹⁴ ST I, 102. J.N.D. Kelly, *The Early Christian Creeds* (London: Longman Group Limited, 1972), 235, explains that 'what we have here is a deliberately formulated

Taken together these two affirmations make the point that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and is God from eternity as the Son whose being is proper to the existence of the Father.¹¹⁵ Jenson suggests that ‘Begotten, not created’ reiterates both these points and emphasizes the eternal existence of this one confessed as Lord. Most basically, the Son is not the first creation of the Father who was created before all times. He is one with God and the one through whom all things were created. Jenson does not offer a clarification of what begotten means in itself.¹¹⁶ Instead, he merely notes what it implies: ‘there is a way in which God initiates that does not issue in something other than God; conversely, there is a way of being initiated, of receiving and not only giving being, that is proper to the true God.’¹¹⁷ Of equally mysterious signification is the famous *homoousion*. According to Jenson, this term was an anti-Arian insertion the meaning of which required interpretation and clarification.¹¹⁸ In turn, he reads the term with the meaning that Athanasius later developed: ‘the relationship of the Son to the Father belongs both to what it means to be God and to the fact of there being a God;’ or more vividly, ‘the Son is the same one [as the Father], by resemblance.’¹¹⁹ Before this latter development and clarification, the *homoousion* functioned as a point of distinction that reiterated the central assumptions just outlined; it made it clear that the God of the Bible worshiped in the church is not Arius’ High and Mighty One who needs a subordinate figure to suffer for the redemption of the world.

According to Jenson, these four points and the creed as a whole ‘clearly differentiate the God of the gospel from the God of that culture through which the gospel entered its world mission.’¹²⁰ This differentiation happened as the councilor fathers recognized that ‘the gospel proclaims a God who is not in fact distant, but

counterblast to the principle tenet of Arianism, that the Son has been created out of nothing and had no community of being with the Father.’

¹¹⁵ The first material point and this following affirmation are the critical anti-Arian epitaphs that Athanasius defends in his well known *de Decretis* or The Defence of the Nicene Creed.

¹¹⁶ In fact he notes that resistance to doing so is a mark of orthodoxy. As a precedent he cites John of Damascus: ‘How God is begotten from God....we do not know and cannot say.’ *Orthodox Faith*, 2.32-36.

¹¹⁷ *ST I*/ 102.

¹¹⁸ Though vague, this term that became critical was clearly polemical even from the beginning. This was due to Arius having previously rejected the phrase; see Kelly, 242-254 and Hanson, 190-202, especially 197.

¹¹⁹ *ST I*/ 103.

¹²⁰ *ST I*/ 102

whose deity is identified with a person of our history.¹²¹ Jesus - who came down from heaven, was enfleshed, became a man, and suffered - is God. The Christian God is not distant, is not beyond and above time, but is present with and for us, as is seen most obviously in the life of his only begotten Son. Ultimately, what Nicea offers is a rejection of the subordinationist logic and the facile Christian synthesis of a foreign theology and the worship of Jesus. In rejecting Arianism, the fathers forcefully asserted what needed to be said about the Son and his eternal relatedness to the Father. In the process, they called for greater clarity and deeper ontological reflection about how both the Father and Son are God. By 381 A.D. this clarity was available as Athanasius and the Cappadocians developed profound conceptions of God's ontological mutuality and hypostatic being.

VI.2 The Perennial Task

Despite the clarity that the Cappadocians achieved, Nicea's critical insights have often been overlooked. This is the case, according to Jenson, because the source of subordinationism, modalism, and Arianism was not noted or explicitly rejected. In effect, the underlying assumptions about deity and temporality upon which these heresies were founded had been decisively contradicted in the creed's statements about the Son. Nevertheless, the implications of this for understanding the hypostatic being of the Father, Jesus, or the Spirit were not expounded. As a result, these remnant contradictory assumptions have continued to be the critical source of many problems in the history of Christian theology. They are the source of the trajectory to secure the identification of God by means other than the biblical narrative, the need to rest in paradox in Christology, and of problems in understanding the personhood of the Spirit. In so far as Christians have failed to understand that Jesus Christ enlightens the way of God as God, there has been a tendency to obscure the perfect unity, diversity, and presence of the triune God.

In the chapters that follow we will describe where Jenson develops this critique as he uses the biblical narrative to clarify the personal diversity and essential unity of the Father, Son, and Spirit. Beginning with the Resurrection, Jenson attempts to describe the persons of God and the way these three are God as a perfect

¹²¹ Ibid.

communion. Within the development of his trinitarian description and theological ontology, the Nicene Creed functions as a criterion that directs reflection on and speech about God. Central to this is the focus on the personal particularity of God the Father, Son and Spirit that the Creed makes clear. The Father, Son, and Spirit are God and yet these three are God in and through their personal distinctiveness that witnesses to their essential mutuality. The most radical aspect of this confession is the identification of Jesus Christ as the one Lord who is God with God. With this description of the Son, the Creed necessitates a theological logic that can accommodate and accentuate God's freedom to be identified by and with a person of our history. Faithful description of the persons of God and the unity of their infinite community can and must appropriate this oddity as it responds to God's self-communication that is free in and through time.

Chapter 2

Describing the God and Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ

I. The Unity of God and the Person of the Father

In the first chapter I argued that the character and direction of Robert Jenson's trinitarian description and theological ontology is determined by his attempt to systematically identify God by and with the Resurrection. I noted that Jenson does this by moving from this event in two directions, to the Old Testament context that grounds the gospel message and to the church's doctrine of the Trinity. To situate this I related Jenson to Karl Barth and highlighted his critical dependence on this seminal thinker. Crucially, Jenson accepts the notion that God in himself is not other than he is in his self-revelation. After this, I argued that Jenson appropriates the logic of the Cappadocian's trinitarianism and uses the Nicene Creed as the criterion of Christian confession. Central to this is Jenson's focus on the hypostatic being of God, which can accommodate and accentuate the personal diversity and essential unity of the triune God.

This last point, that the persons are personal in and through their relations or eternal communion, is commonly accepted. Jenson's assertion that the persons have their hypostatic actuality in different ways and so are God differently is more contentious. At this point we will turn to Jenson's description of the Father of Jesus, who created heaven and earth and all things visible and invisible, to clarify this assertion and illustrate its necessity. In and through his description of the God and Father of Jesus, Jenson highlights the uniqueness of this person of God. This happens as he asserts that the Father is the monarch of deity who unifies the triune community. In other words, this one person of God is the source of the Son and Spirit and is as a person who has his being in relation to the Son and Spirit.

Jenson's complex description of Father attempts to avoid two temptations: first, the temptation to replace YHWH, the one God of Israel, with another basic conception of deity or basic description of spiritual being; second, the temptation to flatten the personal distinctiveness of the Father by a trinitarian over-reading of the biblical narrative. This latter temptation, according to Jenson, leads to a strange subordinationism wherein the Father is exalted beyond the temporal events of Israel's history and so to a place of inaction. Both temptations are essentially incompatible with the gospel. This incompatibility will be demonstrated by showing the way that

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Jenson reads the biblical narrative to describe the God and Father of Jesus. Central to this is the way he accommodates the truths that YHWH is the one God of Israel and one person of God who acts in and with his Word and Spirit.

The critical questions that Jenson addresses in his description of the first person of God appear in Chapter Seven of his *Systematic Theology*, which is entitled ‘The Patrological Problem.’ That there is a problem with the identity of the Father is a novel suggestion of sorts. Jenson’s way of specifying the initial problem to be addressed is also novel. He frames the problem with a question: ‘The Father is the God of Israel; the Father is one among three identities of the God of Israel. How can both of these propositions be true?’¹ This is a strange way of asking how the triune God is one. Jenson’s answer is an attempt to appropriate several basic descriptions of the biblical narrative and rearrange trinitarian description in response to the canonical witness. This leads to a dense and difficult set of propositions about the Father who is the one God and who is one person of God. Jenson begins by asking the ‘*who* question’ and moves to ask *how* this previously identified Father relates to and distinguishes himself from the Son and Spirit; at this point it is critical to clarify the *who* question before answering the *how* question. To satisfy this methodological insight we will describe Jenson’s reading of the biblical narrative as it identifies and describes the Father; from this we will move on to his formal propositions.²

II. Two Basic Descriptions

Jenson’s initial and determining theme is the identification of God by and with the Resurrection of Jesus. From the beginning Jenson notes that this initial and determining theme only makes sense in the context of Israel’s grasp of life and death and their interpretation of God. Central to this interpretation is the confession that

¹ *ST* I, 115.

² Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Christ the Center* trans. Edwin H. Robertson (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1978), 27-37, argues for the necessary priority of the ‘*who* question’ over the ‘*how* question’ in light of the nature of the Word as the Counter-Logos who breaks down and reorients the logic of human thinking. Jenson’s basic approach of beginning with the Resurrection, moving to the persons identified by this logic-rupturing event, and then thinking of the being of God follows this insight and leads to the distinctive character of his trinitarian description and theological ontology.

God is whoever raised Israel from Egypt, who gave his name to Moses, and promised his presence as the hope of this nation's existence. In and through this self-introduction, God is only and ever known as the sovereign and free Lord that chose Israel and created all things. The Nicene Creed begins with the confession that the Lord is the one God almighty who created all things visible and invisible. As such, it affirms one basic belief of the Old Testament about the Lord and his sovereignty over the cosmos. Additionally, the Creed affirms that the God and Father of Jesus is the one God. This picks up a second critical insight of the Old Testament, namely, that YHWH is the one God.

To examine the way in which Jenson is faithful to both of these basic identifying descriptions, this chapter will begin with the identification of the Father as the God of Israel. Although the former identification of God as the Father of Jesus could be given first within any description of Jenson's total system, this approach reaffirms some basic assumptions that were noted in the last chapter. After describing the way that Jenson understands both aspects of the canonical witness we will compare and contrast Jenson to two contemporaneous descriptions of the Father as God. In and through this it is essential to make clear the basic complexity and oddity of the canonical witness that Jenson attempts to incorporate into his description of the God and Father of Jesus Christ.

II.1 YHWH, The Lord God of Israel

Jenson asserts that the perennial temptation of the gentile church is evasion of the confession that God is the God of Israel. The effect of this apostasy, according to Jenson, 'has been mere replacement of her God by some *numen* of the momentarily surrounding religious culture.'³ In so far as its doctrine of God has not been grounded on the Old Testament and Israel's interpretation of God, the church has been tempted by this apostasy to mitigate the directness and actuality of God's relation to Israel. A chief strength of Jenson's theology is the attempt to root the doctrine of the Trinity within the limits set by Israel's interpretation of God. This happens as Jenson describes the way of Israel's God by clarifying the dynamics of temporal identification. The Biblical God is not the distant one of timeless perfection, but is

³ ST I, 43.

the God of the Exodus whose faithfulness leads to the confession that the Lord God is one. Israel's God acts in creation, makes promises, and is faithful to his promises and so to Israel and himself. Jenson notes that for the priestly tradition the end of this self-giving could be summarized as the clarification of this God's name: 'then you shall know that I am JHWH.'⁴

Jenson pairs this end with two basic identifying descriptions given by the Jahwist and Elohist in Exodus: "And JHWH descended...and proclaimed the name JHWH..., 'and 'You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I...brought you to myself.'⁵ In both occurrences the Lord 'seals Israel's national existence by a grant of covenant' and identifies himself as the protagonist of Israel's story. This one and the same acts to make his name known.⁶ This one God is present and active in creation for his chosen people to the end of making himself known and establishing Israel as a priestly and holy nation. In sum, the Lord calls and frees this people and acts to bring this nation to himself. The Lord God acts and is present with his people to reveal his name and give his ear to his people.

This basic interpretation given, Jenson notes the common assumption that the church's trinitarianism departs from Israel's interpretation of God.⁷ In so far as the church's trinitarianism requires an undifferentiated reading of the three persons into the figure of God in the Old or New Testament this is the case. For example, if we can understand the Trinity as one who speaks from heaven at Jesus' baptism, then our conception of triune action is likely to blur the relation between any particular divine action and the identities of God. This is all the more difficult when seeking to understand how the one God acts in triune mutuality in the Old Testament. How does the Lord act with and in his Word and Spirit to make himself known to Israel as a person?

⁴ ST I, 46.

⁵ ST I, 44.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ C. Kavin Rowe, 'Trinitarian Hermeneutics,' *Pro Ecclesia* vol. 10 no.3, 295-314, cogently displays and discusses this problem and its importance for reading the Old and New Testaments as one witness to the triune God. To begin Rowe quotes Claus Westermann, 'Das Alte Testament und die Theologie,' in *Theologie-was ist das?* Eds. Georg Picht and Enno Rudolph (Stuttgart: Kreuz Verlag, 1977), pp. 49-66, to display the typical attitude that asserts radical discontinuity: 'the question of the relation of the persons of the Trinity to one another, and the question of the divinity and the humanity in the person of Christ as a question of ontological relations could only arise when the Old Testament had lost it meaning for the early Christian church.'

To begin, Jenson counters the assumption of disjunction with the assertion that ‘the doctrine of the Trinity only explicates Israel’s faith in a situation in which it is believed that the God of Israel has, prior to the general resurrection, raised Jesus.’⁸ Practically, Christians do not worship another God than the God of Israel. Instead, they worship this God as the Lord who is identified by and with Israel and identified by and with Israel’s Christ. According to Jenson this identification is appropriate to the God of Israel’s hypostatic being as it is displayed throughout the one biblical narrative. In other words, the God of Israel and Father of Jesus has a particular way of being and being in relationship that leads to a distinct way of describing his personal actuality. To clarify this Jenson attempts to identify a plurality of *dramatis dei personae*. The goal of this is to expound Israel’s confession that God is one as ‘a slogan for a drama’ in which a variety of agents appear who are both God and other than God. These “characters of the drama of God”⁹ appear with God and are somehow related to God in distinction from God and Israel. When the Lord acts in faithfulness to Israel he does so with these other characters, in relation to these characters, and in distinction from these characters. The God of Israel is present in and through this and his identity is determined *in* this relation. These dynamics are actual as the Lord acts and is present, but this presence is not a simple presence. Instead, it is a presence that includes God’s Son or Word and God’s Spirit;¹⁰ this is the case since the presence of the God of Israel is always and only a triune presence.

Jenson’s description of the God of Israel introduces the title son to gather together the various figures who, after the fact, are known as one.¹¹ In this range Jenson includes the various shekinah phenomena: the glory of the Lord, the name of the Lord, and the messenger of the Lord. These phenomena are not distinct, according to Jenson, but are various ways of describing the Lord’s settled presence that shares Israel’s lot and the Lord’s being. As such they illustrate a continuous and

⁸ *ST I*, 63.

⁹ *ST I*, 75.

¹⁰ Within Jenson’s description of the God of Israel both of these terms function in their primary Trinitarian sense. For example, he explains that the Son ‘is another by and with whom God is identified, so that what he does to and for this other he does to and for himself.’ *ST I*, 75-6

¹¹ Again, this one that they are known is not Jesus, the one Son of the Father, but instead are one as the anticipation of the Son’s incarnation, that have an actual place in God’s being as the movement to incarnation. This dramatic conception of the Son’s antecedent actuality in created history is one aspect of Jenson’s Christology to which we will turn in the next chapter.

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dominant feature of Israel's identification of God. They do so as each identifies God as a participant in Israel's life. At the same time these characters are related to God. In all of these cases there is another who speaks or acts for God and as God, who comes to Israel from God, but is ultimately identified by and with and as God. Jenson notes that the grammar used to describe this unity and distinction in relation and summarizes the essential points: 'God is identified *with* Israel in that he is identified *as* a participant *in* Israel's story with him.'¹²

The point of this is not to make these figures identical with Jesus or to assert that there is a pre-incarnate Logos functioning in Israel's history that is called various improper names. Nor is the aim to protect the Father from personal involvement in created history. Instead, the goal of Jenson's trinitarian reading of the Old Testament is to describe the way in which the Lord's action essentially includes distinction in agency and results in particular relations between God and Israel and somehow between God and God. The focus is on the action of God that results in the mutual identification of various agents who act with and for Israel and have their being in relation to Israel and God. The most obvious example is the angel of the Lord, who is sent by God and yet speaks as God and acts with God. This one acts as the messenger of God; and yet as this one acts, God himself is present and speaks.¹³

Jenson suggests that the Word of the Lord is another such shekinah phenomenon that displays these relations with particular clarity.¹⁴ When the Word of the Lord is spoken by God two things happen. The Lord is present and a prophet is empowered to be a speaker in Israel. This one and the same person is encountered by the Word and speaks the word. This person does this as one beyond Israel who with Israel receives the Word of the Lord. In this case, the action of the Lord is actual through the Word that is other than God. Nevertheless, this makes the Lord present while at the same time creating relations of mediation and unity in Israel. These same

¹²ST I, 77.

¹³ Brevard Childs, *The Book of Exodus: A Critical, Theological Commentary* (Louisville, Westminster, 1974), 586, suggests that the Angel of YHWH is doubly identified as a substitute and embodiment of God's presence. He also suggests that the resolution of this difficulty is one of the most difficult exegetical questions presented by the Exodus narrative.

¹⁴ ST I, 78.

dynamics abide in the case of the *ebed* of Israel. The servant is one that is sent by God and one that stands within the community that he serves over and against God.¹⁵

Jenson's description of these various *persona* posits a correlation to the dynamics of relation between the Father and the Son. His description of the identity of the Spirit is more direct. This is the case because the Spirit's existence and role in Israel's interpretation of God is more consistent and is consistently more elusive. This is appropriate as the Spirit is one *persona* who appears in various contexts to enliven Israel's life and history, but only appears in his full personhood when Israel's hopes become more eschatological. Then and only then does the Spirit become the means and content of Israel's hope and so become identified as the Spirit given to the community that dwells with God. Nevertheless, Jenson recognizes that this *persona* of God is always active with God and for God. This *persona* is the breath of God and the power of his self-transcendence that makes creation alive, that inspires the prophets, and will anoint God's chosen servant or people. When the Lord acts in the Exodus or in the promised Eschaton, the '*ruach* of the Lord' is present as his power and as his perfecting gift.

By identifying and describing these *persona*, Jenson attempts to illustrate the way of God as he lives, moves, and has his triune being in relation to Israel. In effect, his description of God's action attempts to uphold the Cappadocian rule and Israel's basic interpretation of the way of God. As a result, he reads the action of God in relation to Israel as beginning with the Father, actualized through the Son, and perfected by the Spirit. Consequently, both the Word of the Lord and the Spirit of the Lord are active in creation as God, but they are so only as they are in relation to the Lord and are active with the Lord. Neither of these characters of God are a replacement for the Lord himself. Instead, they witness to the Father and the Father's presence as they act with and in the Father. The Father of Jesus is not beyond the Son in the New Testament, nor in the Old. In and through this triune action, the Lord is known and is rightly identified by and with his acts that are distinctly his acts as one person of God.

At this point, it must be noted that this is an interpretation of Jenson's description of the God of Israel that seems to bring together disparate statements in a

¹⁵ In this case in particular and in all of these cases generally, these dynamics of identification are seen more clearly in light of Christ relation to God and to Israel as this community's head and Christ.

charitable manner. His description of the triune action of God, which manifests the person of the Father, is not as clear as it could be. In particular, Jenson does not explain how the mutual action of the persons reveals the Father as the one God. In a different context he explains that the persons of God are deferential and so lead us to the other persons. It would have been helpful to bring this element of deference into his discussion of the way in which the Son and Spirit reveal the Father as the active and present God of Israel. This is critical because Jenson does not think of the Son and the Spirit as mediating the presence of an ontologically distant first person. The Son and the Spirit are not the two hands of God that do the work of a Father whose face is hidden. Instead, the Father is present and known by Israel. He is the one to whom Moses speaks when he addresses the Angel of the Lord. More directly, the Lord is the one who gives Moses his name. Explaining how the Lord is both with and in these two others who come from God as God would clarify how the Father is present hypostatically; it would also anticipate his experimental synthesis that will examine in section III of this chapter.

II.2 The God and Father who raised Jesus from the Dead

Jenson's description of the Father attempts to avoid a second perennial temptation: the temptation to obscure the identity of the God who raised Jesus from the dead. Jenson's description of the God of Israel and his hypostatic particularity is the first step towards overcoming this tendency. His second step is to make clear the distinction between the God of Israel and Jesus as it is maintained in the New Testament identification of God. Basic to Jenson's argument is the assertion that the New Testament identifies the Lord as the God of Israel whom Jesus called Father. According to Jenson, Jesus' naming of this God as Father 'is both the origin of the identification of "the Father" as one of the Trinity and a confirmation of his reality as the one God.'¹⁶ In Jenson's trinitarian description it is clear that Jesus stands under God and with the Father as God. This one Son is subordinate to God as his creature and equal to the Father as God. In this set of relationships it is also clear that the

¹⁶ *ST I*, 116.

Father is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our Fathers who has glorified his servant Jesus.¹⁷

Jenson begins by suggesting that the basic apostolic description of God is ‘the one who raised Jesus Christ our Lord from the dead.’¹⁸ To support this basic description Jenson cites a string of Paul’s identifying descriptions and 1 Peter 1:21. In Paul’s descriptions the object of belief and the one on whom Christians rely is the God who raised Jesus.¹⁹ This one is known in and through Jesus as the one God who justifies the ungodly. Jenson continues and clarifies that this agent of the Resurrection is the one to whom Jesus prayed and the one to whom his disciples wanted to pray.²⁰ This one and the same is the God of Israel who is Lord over life and death and is the object of the disciple’s worship, adoration and supplication.

Given this basic identification, Jenson suggests that the apostolic witness most comprehensively refers to God as “the Father of our Lord Jesus the Christ.”²¹ As such, the basic description of the God of Israel is conclusively set within the context of Jesus’ life and death. This determinatively identifies God in relation to this Son. In this way the God of Israel is unconditionally paired with this Son who is also called the Lord. The logic of this mutual determining connection is seen in Paul’s use of the title Lord, which suggests that Jesus Christ is the Lord and so worthy of worship as God. This mutual identification of God and the Lord Jesus is confirmed by the risen Lord in his charge to baptise converts in the name of the Father, Son, and Spirit.

Noting these two forms of naming, Jenson suggests that the New Testament’s primary trinitarianism sets Jesus in relation to and distinction from God. This one is described as the one Israelite who fulfils the roles that various *persona* filled throughout the Old Testament. As such, the Son’s singularity is enforced in relation to and distinction from the God of Israel whom he called Father. Within this logic this Son is called the Christ who is paired with God in action and in theological predication; the Son does and has what God does and has.²² This is not to suggest that the New Testament writers thought in the concepts and terms of the later

¹⁷ Acts 3:13.

¹⁸ ST I, 42.

¹⁹ For example Romans 4:24 and I Corinthians 15:15.

²⁰ ST I, 42.

²¹ ST I, 45, citing Romans 15:6 and 2 Corinthians 1:3, et al.

²² The most clear and contentious examples are from John chapters 5 and 6 where Jesus tells the believing and unbelieving Jews that he judges and rules in way appropriate only to God.

confessions. Instead, this clarifies that God is identified as distinct from the Son as his God and is united with Jesus as his Father. This one and the same God and person of God raised Jesus through the power of the Spirit to sit at his right hand in glory as his glory.²³ In other words, God acts in relation to and in distinction from Jesus as the Lord over his life, death and new life. However, this relation of distinction places God over and against this one as the Father who is not without his Son; God the Father is identified by and with the Son and is identified by this Son as the one God. This one God is the creator of the world and the one who made promises to Israel by which Jesus lives in hope and faith. That the God of Israel raised Jesus from the dead confirms the Son's faithfulness, but also confirms the Father's actuality as God. In his particular way of being personal the Father does not have to abstract from one role as God to fulfil the other as the Father.

II.3 Two Contemporaneous Constructions

Jenson's identification of the Father as God is similar to two contemporary theologian's descriptions of the Father as God. Both Karl Rahner and Wolfart Pannenberg move in this same direction to identify the Father with God while developing robust trinitarian theologies that avoid subordinationism. In this context Rahner's argument is more direct and discrete. Because of this it is easier to use Rahner to clarify this double description of the Father as God. Additionally, Rahner develops this argument with extensive exegesis of the New Testament, which makes the essay '*Theos* in the New Testament' dense and rewarding.²⁴

According to Rahner, the basic assurance of the apostolic witness is that God had revealed himself through the prophets to the Fathers and in these last times. This God is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who made Israel his people and himself Israel's God.²⁵ Moreover, this God has sent his Son into the world. This Son reveals the true God as his only begotten Son. In Rahner's judgement the confession of this one God runs through the New Testament.²⁶ He explains that 'this concrete God is the

²³ See Romans 8:11 and Hebrews 1:4-8.

²⁴ Karl Rahner, "Theos in the New Testament," in *Theological Investigations*, vol. I trans. Cornelius Ernst, O.P. (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1961), 79-148. Hereafter abbreviated *Theos* in NT, and page.

²⁵ *Theos* in NT, 98.

²⁶ *Theos* in NT, 100.

unique god intended when monotheism is professed. Anyone who confesses the One God and does not thereby intend to confess in the God of the Fathers and of our Lord Jesus Christ, certainly does not mean the God of whom the primitive Church made confession: but for us there is one God (I Cor. 8:6). This one God is Yahweh, the Father of Jesus, who is the unique God.’ Following this Rahner asks the essential question with dogmatic formality: ‘which of these three [*pater, huios, pneuma hagios*] is meant when the New Testament speaks of *ho theos*?’²⁷

Rahner’s answer is unambiguous: ‘we maintain that in the New Testament *ho theos* signifies the First Person of the Trinity, and does not merely stand for him often.’²⁸ For Rahner, the question at hand is whether the name *theos* refers to all three persons inclusively as the tradition suggests or to the Father specifically. A related issue is whether we are related to each of the Persons of God in a particular way in virtue of grace or to God generally, so that particular roles in God are merely appropriated to the persons.²⁹ This latter issue has immediate import for Rahner both dogmatically and kerygmatically. This is because the specification of God as Father should determine the language of prayer with the end that ‘the Trinitarian structure of our religious life will become more vital, and our consciousness of Christ’s mediation with regard to the Father become more sharp.’³⁰ If *ho theos* functions in the New Testament in a particular way to refer to the Father, and we relate to each person in a particular way in grace, then the actions of God are not merely appropriated to the persons, but are descriptive of their distinct identities.

To support this description of the Father as God, Rahner identifies nine contexts in the New Testament where *theos* refers explicitly and exclusively to the Father as God in relation to or distinction from Christ.³¹ The most obvious example is the use of the phrase ‘Son of God,’ where reference is to the person of God the Father. Rahner details the use of this phrase and notes that Christ uses the phrase, confirms it,

²⁷ *Theos* in NT, 126.

²⁸ *Theos* in NT, 128.

²⁹ In the conclusion to this essay, it becomes clear that a secondary issue at hand is the defence of de Regnon’s paradigm and the supremacy of the Eastern conception of the triune God’s unity. To this ‘secondary issue’ we will return later in this chapter.

³⁰ *Theos* in NT, 129-130.

³¹ Rahner notes in the argument against his thesis that *theos* is used six times to describe Christ as divine. However, he notes that this always occurs as a predicate, or is particularized in some way, and never appears as a grammatical subject. What is most significant, according to Rahner, is the sheer number of times Christ’s divinity is expressed in other way without use of the title.

others us it in a way that specifies that God references the Father.³² The other obvious example is the use of *theos* when referring to God as the Father of Jesus Christ.³³ Other examples include the predication of titles to Christ that relate him to God as the icon, image, word or equal of the Father. Additionally, he notes that ‘there is no doubt that the Father is referred to by *ho theos*...when *ho theos* is said to send the Son, John 8:42, Acts 3:26, Romans 8:3, Galatians 4:4, or when Christ proceeds from God, John 8:42, 13:3, 16:27, or when the Logos is spoken of as being with God, John 1:1, or when God is called ‘the God of our Lord Jesus Christ,’ Ephesians 1:17.’³⁴ He also suggests that there are countless other texts in which God works on Christ or with Christ or in Christ.³⁵ Finally, Rahner clarifies that the Father is denoted as God in ‘the so called Trinitarian formulas.’³⁶

Given the formal variety and material consistency of the New Testament use of *ho theos*, Rahner rightly concludes that ‘God’ properly and particularly refers to the Father. It does so as a reference to the one person of the Trinity to whom the acts of creation and saving history as narrated in the Old Testament are properly and essentially attributed.³⁷ In conclusion, Rahner asserts that God is a term used explicitly and nearly exclusively by Jesus and the rest of the New Testament to identify the Father, not the divine nature or the Trinity.³⁸ Although Rahner’s focus is on the use of *theos* in the New Testament, he brings out the particular double identity of the Father who is God. Additionally, he makes it clear that this God, who is one with Jesus, is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and the God of the Fathers who raised Jesus from the dead.

II.4 An Exegetical Application

³² See John 5:25, Mathew 16:17, and John 3:18 for examples of each use.

³³ John 6:27, ‘Do not work for food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For it is on him that God the Father has set his seal,’ is a clear example.

³⁴ *Theos* in NT, 139.

³⁵ *Theos* in NT, 139.

³⁶ *Theos* in NT, 140; for example Romans 15:30 ‘I urge you, brothers, through our Lord Jesus Christ and through the love of the Spirit to join me in agonizing prayer to God on my behalf.’

³⁷ See Acts 3:12-26, Hebrews 1:1, Acts 4:24, Ephesians 3:9, Hebrews 1:2.

³⁸ Rahner, *Theos* in the NT, 140, also explains that Jesus called himself Son of God, but did not call himself God. Instead, Rahner notes that Jesus refers to God as his Father and himself as the Son of God or the Son of Man.

Jenson's description of the Father accommodates and accentuates the New Testament's double identification of God. To illustrate the significance of this I will indulge in the most brief of comparisons between Jenson and Barth. As was mentioned in the first chapter, Jenson describes Barth as the theologian who taught other theologians in the contemporary context that the doctrine of the Trinity is there to be used. The doctrine helps us solve dogmatic problems and clarify our description of God's action. Nowhere is this more striking than in Barth's doctrine of God where he identifies the man Jesus as the subject and object of God's election.

When describing this identification of God, Jenson identifies two required and path breaking insights of Barth's. Together they move the doctrine beyond abstract conjecture about God in himself sorting out the sheep and the goats. The first is that 'the one sole object of eternal election is Jesus with his people.'³⁹ The second is '[Barth's] christological construal of the relation between election and reprobation.'⁴⁰ This second insight is captured in Barth's assertion that in Christ God elects damnation for himself and salvation for us. This happens, according to Barth, before the foundation of all things as the Son of God elects to be the Son of Man. In this decision the Son accepts as God the rejection due to sinful humanity. This implies that Jesus is and must be the subject and object of election who stands at the beginning of all God's works *ad extra*. In contrast to this, Jenson asserts that 'it is eternally decided in God that the Son is the man Jesus...The Father, exactly in his identity as the Father, is the sole antecedent chooser and sender in this decision.'⁴¹ For both theologians New Testament texts like Ephesians 1:4 are the critical witness to this triune event and the subjectivity of God the Father and Jesus Christ.⁴²

For Barth, Jesus is the elected man and electing God in whom God's people are saved. Because of this there is none other whom we encounter at any point or at any depth of the Godhead.⁴³ We can cling to this one because he is God with God in the beginning, because his election as man is grounded in his electing action before the creation of all things. Jesus is the elected creature who is the true mediator, but is

³⁹ *ST II*, 175.

⁴⁰ *ST II*, 176.

⁴¹ *ST II*, 176.

⁴² Barth asserts that Ephesians 1:3-4 is 'perhaps the strongest presentation of predestination in the New Testament.' *CD II/2*, 429.

⁴³ *CD II/2*, 115.

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also the electing creator as 'His own electing as Creator must have preceded His election as creature.'⁴⁴ Barth specifies the nature of this election in Christ with reference to Ephesians 1:4; he writes, "'in him" does not simply mean with Him...nor does it mean only through him, by means of that which He as elected man can be and do for them. "In Him" means in his person, in His will, in His own divine choice, in the basic decision of God which he fulfils over against every man.'⁴⁵ For Barth, it seems appropriate to assert that the Son as God has a part in choosing the man Jesus so that those in him are elected by his own willing, choice and decision.⁴⁶ He explains that 'in that He (as God) wills Himself (as man), He also wills them...in and with His own election.'⁴⁷

It is clear for Barth that the God who chooses those in Christ is God the Father and God the Son; the Son of God chooses as God the man in whom we live, move, and have our being.⁴⁸ This emphasis on the subjectivity of the Son is made with reference to the actuality of both natures in the person of Christ, the reality of the Son's choosing in eternity and in time, and the perichoresis of the persons; his exegesis of this passage is difficult to interpret apart from these complex dogmatic issues. Despite this recognition it is with specific reference to the 'in Him' formula that Barth focuses on the subjectivity of the Son in the choice of God. This theological exegesis of Ephesians 1:4 brings the issue to a head: is it the case that the

⁴⁴ CD II/2, 116.

⁴⁵ CD II/2 117.

⁴⁶ Mary Kathleen Cunningham, *What is Theological Exegesis? Interpretation and use of Scripture in Barth's doctrine of Election* (Valley Forge, Pa: Trinity Press International, 1995), offers a close reading of Barth's exegesis as it relates to Ephesians 1:4; she argues very perceptively that Barth makes this move as he places the Ephesians texts in fruitful tension with John 1:1. This is done to assert Jesus' presence in the beginning as God. Barth also uses John 13:8, 15:16 & 19 to assert his active presence. This method of theological exegesis is beyond reproach. However, one must ask about the relevance of John 14:28, 8:40-42, 13:3 and 16:27, where Jesus makes it clear that he comes from God, is going to God, and clarifies that this is the Father. Jesus' confession in his high priestly prayer that the Father is the one God is also particularly clear and relevant. John 20:17 is equally clear in that Jesus tells his disciples that he is ascending to his Father and their Father, to his God and theirs.

⁴⁷ CD II/2, 117.

⁴⁸ CD II/2, 65. Barth revisits this issues with special reference to the role of the perichoresis of the person in the triune being. The question this raises is whether the participation of the Son in the decision of the Father implies that he chooses as the Father chooses and so chooses identically to the Father.

Trinity chooses Christ with his brothers and sisters? Is the subject of our choosing in Ephesians the Trinity or is it the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ?

Ho theos appears three times before the use in question, twice in the genitive and once in the nominative. The first occurrence is in the opening greeting of the letter where Paul identifies himself as an apostle through the will of God. In this instance the subject of this willing through which Paul is chosen is not explicitly specified. In the next two uses things are more precise. In verse two the grace and peace that Paul shares with the Ephesians is from the Lord Jesus Christ and from God our Father. In verse three Paul begins a single sentence that spans fourteen verses. At the head of this is a blessing of God, who is identified as the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. This one and the same is then described as the one who blesses us in Christ with every spiritual blessing. In a similar way,⁴⁹ *ho theos* chooses us before the foundation of the world in Christ to be before him. This antecedent chooser predestines us for himself through Christ Jesus and blesses us in this beloved one, who is the one in whom his will for all things is set forth.⁵⁰ Given the prior specification in this sentence of God as the Father it appears that the subject of this most complex and rich sentence is God the Father. This one who is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who blesses us richly in Christ, is the one whose will and choice and decision before the creation of the world determines our existence in and with Christ.

In this passage Christ is the elected one in whom we are blessed, the one who is the beloved, and the one in whom we have redemption from our sins. He is not the God who chooses to be one with us before the creation of the world.⁵¹ Instead, it is the one God who is also identified as the Father; this one is God and the God who chooses us with Jesus Christ and seals his choice with and in his Holy Spirit.⁵² Jenson's description of the Father as God accommodates this type of complex description where the Father is clearly and unambiguously identified as God and as

⁴⁹ The adverbial use of *kathws* specifies that what follows happens just as what has been mentioned. The one who blesses us in Christ is the one who chooses us in him.

⁵⁰ Ephesians 1:9.

⁵¹ Cunningham, *What is Theological Exegesis?*, 21, admits that 'it is at the very least not apparent that...Ephesians 1:4f refers to Jesus Christ as electing God and elected human.'

⁵² Ephesians 1:13-4.

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the one who is the active subject of our electing. In sum, this clarity presses us to ask whether the in Him formula of Ephesians 1:4 really means by him as Barth suggests.

Where does this leave us? It does not mean that Jesus is a passive object of God's choosing that is indistinguishable from others chosen by God.⁵³ Neither does it mean that we have to look beyond Jesus to the unknown God who chooses us in him. Nor does it mean that Jesus the Son does not have a choice to make in and with the Father before the foundation of the world.⁵⁴ What it does mean is that our Father acts in eternity as God and does so in a way that he acts as himself and makes choices that are not *identical* to the Son's choices. Our description of God the Father, who chooses us in our Lord Jesus Christ, must be able to accommodate this type of personal description that implies real distinctions between the persons of God. Likewise, description of the Father as God must avoid subordinating or excluding the Son and Spirit. In this sense, Jenson's identification of the Father as the antecedent chooser is proper if it does not exclude the persons of the Son and Spirit and so separate this God from his existence as the Father.

Regardless, this comparison brings to focus the way in which the New Testament typically describes the Father as God in complex and nuanced ways. This complexity and nuance can be confused by a trinitarian over-reading of the canonical witness. This type of over-reading remains a temptation if and when the action of God must be predicated identically or indifferently to the persons. What our dogmatic formulations must be grounded in and responsive to is this complexity as it witnesses to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus. In sum, both aspects of this title, God and Father, must be held together and expressed to think rightly about the person of the Father and the one triune God in response to canonical witness.

III. An Experimental Synthesis

⁵³ Barth, *CD* II/2, 159, recognizes that 'the obedience which he renders as the Son of God is, as genuine obedience, His own decision and electing, a decision and electing no less divinely free than the electing and decision of the Father and the Holy Spirit.' Nevertheless Barth's speaks of a acting, decision, and choice that appears to be other than and prior to this decision of response.

⁵⁴ This is a point we will return to at length with reference to Philippians 2:6-11 and 2 Corinthians 8:9 to criticise the way that Jenson's proper insight is obscured by his emphasis on the *sole* antecedent choosing of the Father.

In his description of the Father, Jenson tries to highlight and then conceptually accommodate the double identity of the Father. He does the later with the suggestion that there is more than one way for an identity to be a person or to be personal. More exactly, Jenson suggests the Father is a person of God and as the monarch of deity is the personality of the triune community. This one and the same identity is doubly identified because he is a person or is personal in these two ways. This complex description of the Father tries to incorporate two traditional assertions: first, that the Trinity is the one God, and therefore the God of Israel;⁵⁵ and, second, ‘one person of the Trinity, the Father, is the God of Israel and therefore is the one God.’⁵⁶ Additionally, this description, that might appear to describe a schizoid deity, is an attempt to appropriate the strengths of both the Eastern and Western ways of conceptualizing God’s unity. It is an attempt to witness to the unity of the persons in their eternal and self-constituting communion and the particular role of the Father who is properly identified as the one God.

As a way of general introduction, Jenson notes that the Eastern strength is the way it can specify the Father’s particularity as the *arche* of the Son and Spirit who is without *arche*. In this way the Father’s place in triune community is distinguished with an exclusive description of this hypostases. Despite this gain Jenson notes that this method of differentiating the Father has a tendency towards isolating his place above the Spirit and Son’s place in the triune God’s mutual life.⁵⁷ In contrast, Jenson admits the Western strength is that it secures equal standing of the three within God. This is secured by the confession that the Father, Son, and Spirit are fully and mutually *homoousios*. However, in itself or by itself Jenson thinks that this way is ultimately unsatisfactory for the reason stated above: it can lead towards modalism by blurring the distinctive action of each person by which they are identified in the biblical narrative.⁵⁸ Identifying the need to identify the persons distinctively and assert their unity and equality, Jenson makes a methodologically typical move to appropriate the strengths of both traditions while transcending their weaknesses. To attempt this synthesis Jenson answers a rephrased question: ‘is the Trinity itself

⁵⁵ ST I, 115.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ ST I, 116

⁵⁸ Ibid.

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personal or a personal reality? Is it self the right word? Should it not be himself?’⁵⁹ Central to his answer is his notion of the person.

III.1 Jenson’s Basic Conception of a Person

Jenson begins to make this complex notion explicit by stating and critiquing Boethius definition of a person: an individual entity endowed with intellect.⁶⁰ To develop this notion positively, Jenson follows Tertullian and suggests that a person or *persona* is a subsistent social relation. More specifically, persons are agents whose actuality is constituted in a particular set of social relations of address and response. He continues and explains that ‘a person is one with whom other persons – the circularity is constitutive – can converse, whom they can address.’⁶¹ This sense of persons, as it focuses on address and response, assumes and expands the Cappadocian’s definition of *hypostasis*: ‘something that can be counted and to which characteristics can be attributed, some of these characteristics generic for all hypostases of the same *ousia*, and some differentiating the *hypostasis* from hypostases of the same *ousia* and so making it countable among them.’⁶² This synthesis adds a specific adverbial aspect to the basic meaning of hypostases, as developed by the Cappadocians. In Jenson’s description of the persons of God this nuance plays on the Cappadocian interpretation of *hypostasis* as ‘way of having being.’ The effect is that the persons are conceived of in converse with the other two other persons where their distinctiveness is bound up with their characteristic interaction.

In this way Jenson combines the Western logic of subsisting relation with the Eastern conception of generation and procession. This suggests that it is in relation as conversation, not merely in the begetting and breathing, that the hypostases of God are actual; specifying origin and mode of being is essential to differentiate the three hypostases.⁶³ Stated more clearly or with more of an emphasis on verbosity: the Father, Son, and Spirit are actual, personal and active as they are engaged in an eternal conversation that constitutes their being. The dynamics of this conversation

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ To the following see *ST I*, 117-9

⁶¹ *ST I*, 117.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ See Vladimir Lossky, *In the Image and Likeness of God* (Crestwood NY: St.Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1976), 46-76, for the counter-position.

and so of their communion is determined by the primal act of the Father to speak the Word who is his Son in the power of the Spirit. Without this event of speaking and response there is no Son or Spirit and so no second or third *hypostasis*. Likewise, there is no God and Father without the response of these two who have their personal actuality in relation to their source. This emphasis on the exchange of conversation highlights the way in which each person is a person in and through the Father's speaking, the Son responding and the Spirit liberating each for the other.

This adverbial aspect is captured in Jenson's preferred term: identity. Most basically, this term 'construes self-identity on the horizon of time, as *hypostasis* does not.'⁶⁴ Taking all this together Jenson suggests that modern notions of personhood, 'which suggest that individuals are individuals by role differentiation within narrative', capture the particular nature of the Father, Son, and Spirit's being as it is displayed in the biblical narrative and in their perfect inter-relation.⁶⁵ In sum, it is only as each identity is with the other two in conversation and identified in mutual action that they have their being as persons.

III.2 Beyond the Basics of Personhood

In this description of the Father, Jenson uses *persona*, *hypostasis*, and identity as synonyms, but then tries to draw a distinction between the terms. This is the second step in his attempt to distinguish between the way the Trinity is personal and at the same time three persons. This step begins with a question: 'even if...we think of personality ontologically..., and even if *persona* is then an immediately appropriate word for the three of the biblical narrative, must one identity always be one person or one person one identity?'⁶⁶ To suggest that this is not the case, Jenson draws a common point from two doctrines to raise a possibility.

Both the doctrine of original sin and the doctrine of imputed righteousness seem to imply a distinction between personality and identity. Following Jonathan Edwards, Jenson explains that 'Adam and the human race, as to sin are "one complex person;" and in imputing Christ's righteousness to us, God does not traffic in fiction, since he treats Christ and us as a single person, which we truly are just because he so

⁶⁴ *ST I*, 118

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ *ST I*, 119

treats us.’⁶⁷ In effect, we are one with Adam and then by God’s grace one with Christ; and yet, we are distinct from Christ. This distinction in unity is evident, for example, as Jesus speaks to us without abstracting from our unity with him and existence in him. In this way I am one with Christ as one person to whom the Father can speak. At the same time, I am a distinct identity to whom Jesus can also turn and speak while I am in his body. Noting this duality of personal existence, Jenson considers the possibility that ‘there may be more than one way to be personal, even to be a person.’⁶⁸

Taking up this possibility, Jenson experiments with the identity of the Father. He suggests that the one God addressed in prayer by believers with Christ in the Spirit is the Father. Additionally, this one person is the God of Israel who can be addressed as the unity of this community, as its personality, or the Trinity as ‘a person.’ This second possibility is actual for Jenson in pure doxology where we are enveloped by the particular persons of God and at the same time can call out to the Son or the Spirit, or to the Trinity as God.⁶⁹ In this last case, Jenson suggests that such doxological speech is directed to the Father as the person whose actuality is the unity of this community. In this way, the Father is recognized as the God of Israel, as the God and Father of Jesus, and as the person who is also the Trinity or the personality of this community. At this point Jenson suggests that such double speak matches the dialectics of the problem that was noted at the beginning of the chapter: that the Father is one person of God and also called the God of Israel. As a result, his explanation of the way in which the Father is the personality of the Trinity should answer our earlier critique. More directly, his description of the person of the Father should explain how the Father is in the Son and the Spirit and so should be called the God of Israel.

Jenson begins to explore the two ways of addressing the Father by suggesting that these two ways indicate two ways of being. The first indicates the hypostatic actuality of the Father. The second a way of being personal ‘otherwise than he is hypostatically.’⁷⁰ Jenson admits that such dialectics verge on the edge of meaninglessness by stretching the capacity of language to refer doubly to a single

⁶⁷ *ST I*, 119-120

⁶⁸ *ST I*, 120

⁶⁹ *ST I*, 122.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

person. He even poses the possibility that this duality is merely his own device.⁷¹ Nevertheless, he presses on doing two things: first, accommodating the basic descriptions of scripture as revelatory of the Lord's being, and, second, suggesting a connection between the dialectics of prayer to this double identification.

To clarify this identification of God ontologically Jenson uses the common western scheme of consciousness. In the first instance Jenson describes the Father as 'this consciousness [who] finds his "I" in the Son, just thereby becoming himself a focused locus of experience, and in such fashion that the Son and the Father are free for each other in the Spirit.'⁷² In this sense, the Father is one person among the three who knows himself in knowing the concrete other person who is the Son; what he knows in knowing the Son, as another over and against himself, is himself as the Father of this man. Were Jenson to stop here, his description of the Father would only account for the identification of the Father as one person of the Trinity. Presupposing this description and the consciousness of God as Father, he suggests that this one and the same identity can know himself as the *arche* of the Son and the Spirit. Just as we praise the Father with the Son and the Spirit who are both from and in the Father, Jenson suggests that we can recognize that the Father is *in* the Son and Spirit. Likewise, the Father can know himself as the *arche* in knowing these other two. Again, assuming that God knows himself as the Father in the Son, he can also know himself as the source of this Son, as the one who speaks his Word and breathes the Spirit. This is the case because he is with and in these two whom he begets and breathes. The Son and the Spirit never surpass their existence as the Son and Spirit of the Father. Nor, do they exist in abstraction from the perichoretic inner penetration of the persons. Because of this perfect coinherence the Father can know himself as the one God who is active *in* and with this Son and present *in* and with this Spirit as their source.⁷³ Noting this possibility, Jenson suggests that this one and the same identity can know himself in this second and secondary way as God. In this secondary way of being and knowing, the Father maintains the unity of triune community in the particular way he affirms his intention to have and be one with his Son and his Spirit.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² ST I, 123

⁷³ T.F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997), 140, suggests that this is the case for all the persons.

In this secondary way of self-knowledge the Father knows himself as the one God. As such the Father is a person in a second way as the one God. As a result, there is not a fourth personal identity above and beyond the Father, Son, and Spirit that makes the Trinity personal. Instead, this secondary or perichoretic aspect of personality that is inseparable from the existence of the Son and Spirit differentiates the Father as the ground and unity of the one triune community. Moreover, he can know himself in this secondary way as the identity that is free in his self-constituting relations with the Son and Spirit and the one who is free *in se* as 'his own only presupposition.'⁷⁴ If this description of the *Father* as *arche* was separated from the prior description of this God as Father, then subordination would necessarily follow this conceptual formation. As it stands, the Father can be known as the mon-*arche* because of his hypostatic particularity that is revealed in and with the Son and Spirit.

From this unique way of indwelling it follows that the Father is rightly known as the God of Israel. He is the one God known in and with his Word and Spirit. Because this action is perfectly mutual, the Father is not distant from the appearance of the Word or the movement of the Spirit. Moreover, the Father is in the Word and the Spirit and so active in speaking to and hearing from Israel. Because of his particular way of knowing and being, the one God and Father of Jesus Christ is known in and through his Son and Spirit and in relation to his Son and Spirit.

III.3 A Tenuous Extension of the Tradition

At this point, Jenson is treading on the verge of meaninglessness as his trinitarian description attempts to hold together two basic descriptions. These basic truths will be known as true in the end, but can be reflected on in faith and so in anticipation in the present. Despite this position of anticipation, there is an aspect of Jenson's reflection to be noted here that is significant for what follows. Jenson takes his starting point and trajectory from the biblical narrative and is guided by this even as he works at the extreme of conceptual reflection. In practice, this means that there is no move to counterfactual speculation, nor is there a tendency to leave behind the Son or Spirit for other conceptual entities when describing the unity of the one God. For example, the Son and Spirit are not identified with the intellect and will of God.

⁷⁴ *ST* I, 123.

In this way, Jenson is faithful to the description of God as he is identified in the biblical narrative with these two who are both God from God. In sum, Jenson is willing to use the traditional scheme but not willing to force the particular persons of God into a different model. Methodologically, his prior answer to the 'who question' is not obscured when he ask the 'how question' and uses notions in the tradition that are foreign to the canonical witness.

This last point is especially relevant because Jenson's description of the Father attempts to preserve and rescue Augustine's psychological explanation of the triune life.⁷⁵ According to Jenson, this tradition understands the Trinity as personal and the identities of the triune God as 'the poles of the inner life that makes him personal.'⁷⁶ This one life is the life of the personal God and yet each identity is also in some sense understood as personal. As such, there is within this tradition a need to mitigate either the personal nature of the Trinity or the personal actuality of the three to avoid the untraditional conclusion that there are in fact four personalities or identities. If there is one way for the Trinity to be personal as an aspect of the Father's existence and another way for the Father, Son, and the Spirit to be personal, then there are in the end only the three persons and their one life that is unified by the identity of the Father. In this description there is not a subjectivity that appears beyond the three, but there is instead a personal aspect of the Father's being that is the ground and unity of this one life. In sum, the persons are personal and poles within the one life that is personal as it is the one God's life that begins with the Father is actual in the Son and is perfected by the Spirit.

This account of the triune life as a single subjectivity is critical for Jenson. In fact, it reappears at critical points to summarize the description of each person. What is most unusual and most contentious in Jenson's use of this schema is the interpretation of God's subjectivity as unreservedly ecstatic; Jenson's triune God is not a self-contained and perfectly independent subject, nor is there a reservation of any aspect of the triune God's life above and beyond the life of these three persons. This is unavoidable given Jenson's resistance to counterfactual speculation. If the only Son through whom the Father finds himself is Jesus then his self-knowledge is ultimately and essentially ecstatic.

⁷⁵ *ST I*, 123.

⁷⁶ *ST I*, 123.

To make this point and to place himself in line with Barth, Jenson relies on a simple, if not simplistic, contrast between Aquinas and Barth.⁷⁷ In this contrast Jenson critiques the self-contained God of Aquinas by positing the self-revealing God of Barth as the one God of the biblical narrative. Jenson suggests that for Barth God is personal in that he triunely opens himself to creation. God speaks and is known in creation in triune specificity as the active and present God who is known through his word. As was noted in the last chapter, this self-giving for Barth is a self-interpretation where the self-satisfied God graciously gives himself as God in a second way of being triune without giving himself away. There is self-giving as there is correspondence between God in himself and God for us. As such, Barth's description of the absolute subjectivity of God in self-duplication stands between Thomas' self-contained and Jenson's self-determining God. For the former God is perfect as he is distant *in se*. For the later God is perfect in his self-determining motion mediated by the Son and perfected by the Spirit.

For Jenson, the identification of the Father as the God of Israel necessitates the conclusion that God is personal and perfectly one as he is faithful in time and through time. To this point I have argued that this follows from the basic description of the canonical witness that God is freely, but truly identified by and with Israel and the events of the Exodus. Taking this witness seriously, Jenson's description of the Father also accommodates the New Testament witness to the Father as the God who raised Jesus from the dead. In this last section I have made it clear that Jenson's experimental synthesis of these two truths leads to a complex set of affirmations about the unique way that the Father is a person of God with his Son and Spirit. Central to this interpretation is an asymmetrical application of the notion of the perichoresis of the persons. Although dense and difficult, this description of the Father's hypostatic particularity is commendable because it attempts to be faithful to the complexity of scripture's witness and the church's confession. Moreover, Jenson describes the Father's particularity as a second perspective available within our participation in the triune life. As such, his most abstract trinitarian description is bound and limited by more concrete and direct descriptions of the persons.

⁷⁷ ST I, 124.

IV. The Monarchy of the Father

In making this argument, Jenson notes that the traditional position of the East has been most drastically and influentially made in the current context by John Zizioulas.⁷⁸ In various articles and in *Being and Communion* Zizioulas develops an ontology of communion that has a special place for the Father. In this ontology the concept of person has absolute and ontological content and moves beyond Aristotelian generalities and Platonic monism. As a result, 'the person is no longer an adjunct to being...*It is itself the hypostasis of being.* Entities no longer trace their being to being itself...but to the person.'⁷⁹ When this path is traced, particular persons in relation are found at the centre of theological reflection, whether the subject is God or the human community gathered in worship. In Zizioulas' account of the Trinity, the Father is the person *par excellence* who begets the Son and breathes the Spirit. Likewise, the Father is a person who exists with and only with the Son and Spirit; 'his being is identical with an act of communion.'⁸⁰ This one is as such the cause, source and monarch of the divine being. He secures the unity of the Trinity in his personal freedom as the person he is with the Son and Spirit.⁸¹

In *Persons in Communion* Alan Torrance critiques Zizioulas for grounding the unity of the one God's communion in the Father's personhood. Torrance suggests that this move to follow the Cappadocians leads to two things: first, a failure to appreciate the ontological significance and necessity of the essential union in the divine communion, and, second, a projection of a causal ordering in God that reduces the unity of the Trinity to the personal singularity of the Father.⁸² Ultimately and ironically, the identification of being and communion is undercut by a cosmological theology if the Father is identified in his personal *singularity* as the *cause* of the Trinity. Torrance suggests that this happens as this 'ontology of communion risks being subsumed by a cosmological category of causality;'⁸³ In and through his critique it becomes obvious that Torrance's two points of resistance are related. In

⁷⁸ *ST I*, 116.

⁷⁹ Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 39.

⁸⁰ *Being as Communion*, 44.

⁸¹ *Being as Communion*, 46.

⁸² Alan Torrance, *Persons in Communion* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2001), 289 and 291. Hereafter abbreviated, *Persons in Communion*, and page.

⁸³ *Persons in Communion*, 291.

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short, he is critical of any suggestion that the Father *alone* grounds the being and communion of the Trinity as a primal cause and so in his personal singularity. To focus on the singularity or individual existence of the Father appears to undervalue the essential unity of the persons.

Torrance notes Zizioulas' contention that it is impossible to think or speak of the Father or one God without speaking of the one God who is communion, but is unconvinced. Instead, he suggests that for Zizioulas the ontologically primordial actuality in God is the person of the Father who as the one cause of deity is above and so beyond the Son and the Spirit. This is the case because each is a person in a profoundly different way. In conclusion Torrance argues that 'these arguments suggests a failure to interpret the oneness of God in the light of the free communion and mutuality of God.'⁸⁴ This critique raises an issue particularly relevant to Jenson's double-identification of the Father: can the persons of God be persons in different ways? Or, does the suggestion that the person's are distinct and have their being in different ways necessarily lead to ontological differentiation?

IV.1 The Critique in its Mature Form

In making this critique, Alan Torrance notes and appropriates T.F. Torrance's argument against this Cappadocian conceptual framework that includes the idea of the monarchy of the Father.⁸⁵ The elder Torrance's concern is that this framework in general and this argument in particular, in so far as it predicates causality of being to the Father's hypostatic person, subordinates the Son and Spirit as eternally derived or 'caused' persons. This trajectory, according to Torrance, has its starting point in the Cappadocians attempt to describe the persons as personally and objectively distinct, equal in deity, and united in mutual action.⁸⁶ This move away from the central assertion of the identity of the persons leads to a causal chain of being, an impersonal conception of the divine nature, ontological differentiation within the immanent

⁸⁴ *Persons in Communion*, 291.

⁸⁵ T. F. Torrance develops this critique in several places; for examples see *The Trinitarian Faith* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 211-21 and 310f; and, *Trinitarian Perspectives* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 29f. Hereafter abbreviated, *Trinitarian Perspectives*, and page.

⁸⁶ T.F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God* (Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 1998), 177. Hereafter abbreviated *Doctrine of God*, and page.

Trinity, and ultimately to the subordination of the Son and Spirit. This happened, Torrance suggests, as the Cappadocians tried to ground the unity of the Trinity in the person of the Father who causes the being of the Son and the Spirit without distancing himself from his effects.⁸⁷

In contrast, Torrance follows Calvin, Gregory Nazianzen, and Athanasius and suggests two things: first, that the Son and Spirit must necessarily partake in the monarchia of the Godhead; and, second, that the order grounded in the irreversible relations of the Father and Son do not apply to the being of God, but are relevant to the economy.⁸⁸ At the heart of both points is a resistance to any type of subordinationism. This is paired with and driven by the insistence that the persons of God are equal, are all truly God, and so must necessarily be *identical* in deity.⁸⁹ This is not to say that T.F. Torrance rejects the idea of the Monarchy of the Father. In *The Christian Doctrine of God* he explains that the Monarchy of the Father is actual in the missions of the Son and the Spirit and real as the whole Trinity is the monarchy, which implies the perichoretic participation of the Father with the Son and Spirit in the One Being of God that is the Monos.⁹⁰ In both of these cases the Father is understood to be *homoousios* to the Son and the Spirit as one person who has his being in relation to other persons. In this sense the Father is a person with persons whose deity is identical to his own. In addition, Torrance suggests that there is another sense in which the Father functions as an absolute term for the divine being itself; this one Father is the *autotheos* of the tradition or *theos* whose being is the source of the Son and the Spirit.⁹¹ This use of Father is not to be understood as the Father in his hypostatic actuality, which is inseparable from his being one God with the Son and Spirit as identical, equal, and enhypostatic persons. Instead, this use of Father refers to the one God as the *ousia* from which the Persons of the Son and Spirit proceed.

⁸⁷ *Doctrine of God*, 178.

⁸⁸ *Trinitarian Perspectives*, 29.

⁸⁹ Colin Gunton, 'Being and Person: T.F. Torrance's Doctrine of God,' in *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology* ed. Elmer M. Colyer (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2001), 129-134, criticises the way that Torrance applies this logic of equality and identity in community. Ultimately, Gunton suggests that Torrance reads the Eastern Fathers with Western eyes. More specifically, Gunton criticises Torrance for having an uncontrollable homousial drive in this theology that flattens the distinctions of the persons.

⁹⁰ *Doctrine of God*, 183.

⁹¹ *Doctrine of God*, 140.

When this second sense of the Father is used in this way several problems appear within Torrance's trinitarian propositions. In effect, this use of the Father as the *autotheos* obscures the relational nature of the one God's being. Secondly, it leads to an insufficient description of the person of the Father in his characteristic *idioma* and all the persons in general. To begin, is it not the case, as Torrance suggests, that the one being of God is constituted by the mutual relations of the Father, Son, and Spirit as persons? However, if the Son and Spirit proceed from this one Being, which can be called the Father *in se*, this raises questions about the hypostatic actuality of the Father. For example, does the Father *in alios* proceed from this same Being? If so, is this *autotheos* the one God beyond and above the three persons in perichoretic relation as their source and *arche*? This interpretation of the *autotheos* concept would lead to a strange sort of modalism and contradict the axiom that God's being is in relation. In other words, if there is a being of God from which the Spirit and Son proceed that is other than the Father, then there appears to be a being above and beyond the persons and their relations.

If this is not the case, is this Father/*autotheos* identical to the Father who exists in relation to the Son and Spirit? If this is the case, then the *autotheos*/Father would appear to be the source of the Son and Spirit as the *ousia* of God. This would suggest that the Father is absolute in himself as the being of God. His relation to the Son and Spirit as the person of the Father would then be an adjunct to the divine *ousia*. Either way, Torrance's rejection of the monarchy of the Father leads to conceptual problems. In short, this confusion leads to the obverse problem that Torrance critiques in the Cappadocian brothers: the Nicene *ousia* of the Father is identified with the *ousia* of God and absorbs the hypostatic actuality of the Father. Ultimately, the Father simply becomes the divine being as the independent source of being or the Father, Son, and Spirit are described as persons in relation that are ambiguously related to the divine being.

This confusion of the Father with the *ousia* of God comes about as Torrance rigidly or literally follows the creed of Nicea to suggest that the Son is begotten from the *ousia* of the Father. This in itself is obviously right; what is wrong is to read an Athanasian conceptuality of the homousial character of the one God back into this. In the Creed itself the distinction between *homoousia* and *hypostasis* is not as clear as it came to be in the tradition; nor is it as clear as Torrance assumes and then uses to argue against the procession of the Son and Spirit from the *hypostasis* of the Father.

This ambiguity is made obvious in the anathema of the creed of Nicea where the two terms are used as synonyms.⁹² At Nicea the Fathers were clear that the Son is God with God and as such is *homoousios* to the Father. Likewise, they were clear that the begetting of the Son is internal and so essential to the Father's being. However, the terms that they use to express this are not as clearly defined and differentiated in the Creed as they become in the tradition or even by 381.⁹³ This internal and contextual ambiguity noted, it must be admitted that within the creed of Nicea *ousia* could mean the being of the Father or could simply refer to an essential aspect of the Father's particular existence. Regardless, it must be admitted that the Creed of Nicea does not demand thinking of the begetting of the Son from the being of God conceived as something other than the *hypostasis* of the Father. As a result, it is improper to appeal to the creed of Nicea as a definitive argument against attributing the procession of the Son and Spirit from the person of the Father.⁹⁴

As the tradition developed Athanasius was certainly right to see that the Father, Son, and Spirit are of the same *ousia* and so are equally God because each is fully God. In addition, the Cappadocians were certainly right to follow Athanasius and develop a distinction between the three hypostases who share and constitute this one *ousia*. Despite this development and clarification it is not necessary or helpful to read begotten from the *ousia* of the Father as the homoousial character of the one God's being. As has been argued this leads to the difficulty of distinguishing the uniqueness of Father. This difficulty is compounded when Torrance fully follows Athanasius axiom 'that whatever we say of the Father we say of the Son and the Spirit

⁹² See R.C.P. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 168-9 and 190-197. Hanson writes, 'the other really remarkable point about [the creed of Nicea] is the condemnation in the anathemas at the end of the view the Son is 'of another hypostasis or ousia' from the Father. This can only have been a highly ambiguous and extremely confusing statement. By the standard of later orthodoxy, as achieved in the creed of Constantinople of 381, it is a rankly heretical proposition, because the Son must be of a different hypostasis from the Father.' (168) Hanson goes on to show that the key terms were anything but clearly defined in the context of the debate before, during and immediately after 325 AD.

⁹³ This unclarity persist in the mature writings of Athanasius; for example see the *Orations Against the Arians*, II.65.

⁹⁴ Torrance seems to do this at two critical points in his critique of the Cappadocian conceptuality; see *Doctrine of God*, 177 and 178. Instead of explaining what is insufficient in the 'chain of causal dependency' Torrance offers this rebuttal and of a counter position, which depends on the assumption that the identity of the persons is the central criterion of trinitarian description.

except ‘Father.’”⁹⁵ In effect, this over reading of the *homoousion* and over-emphasis on the perichoresis of the persons obscures the personal distinction of the Father and the real differences between the persons. Although Torrance speaks of the characteristic *idioma* of the persons this appears to lack positive content; what we are left with is equal and identical persons in relation whose positions as poles in a standing relation are their total distinctiveness.⁹⁶

What does this suggest? First, that upholding the equality of the persons and interpreting the *homoousion* rightly does not require a rejection of the monarchy of the Father. As has been shown, the alternative suggestion that the Son and Spirit proceed from the being of the Father is simply confusing. Moreover, this construction leads to an underemphasis on the Father’s particularity. Second, it has been shown that the related suggestion, namely, that the Father, Son, and Spirit participate in the Monarchy of God as the Monas, leads to confusion about the hypostatic particularity of all the persons. In effect, the emphasis on the identity of the persons is problematic if it obscures the dependence and mutuality of the persons in relation. It might be the case that causal language is not the best means of expressing the mystery of the begetting of the Son and the procession of the Spirit. However, this does not imply that the Father is not the source of the Son and Spirit. Before addressing this question relative to Jenson’s trinitarian propositions, it is best to look at the legitimacy of describing the Father as the *Mon-arche*.

IV.2 The Legitimacy of the Monarchy

The insistence that the two processions in God are from the person of the Father must be demonstrated from scripture’s witness to God’s personal diversity and inner relation. Basic to the notion of the Monarchy is the affirmation that the Son is begotten of the Father. If the language of begotten is more than merely metaphorical and does more than speak of an internal and essential relationship, then it points to a mysterious dependence of the Son on the Father. To be begotten implies that there is a

⁹⁵*Doctrine of God*, 180.

⁹⁶ See *Doctrine of God*, 180 for example.

relationship of origin as one gives and the other receives being. If we take this mysterious language as material description of God, it must be that there is a way of giving and receiving personal existence in God. It must be that the Son is begotten, not created, by the Father as the Son of God. There must be away of coming into being that does not separate the persons of God or distinguish levels of deity.

In addition to this basic affirmation, three verses from John provide the essential witness relevant to the Son's procession from the Father.⁹⁷ John 13:3 is especially relevant here as it specifies Jesus relation to the Father; this one his origin and telos in God. John 15:26 is the *locus classicus* that specifies the Spirit's procession from the Father. More generally, the Spirit's dependant aspect and the Son's obedience to the Father support the idea that there is an order of priority and position within God's triune life. This is made more clear in the high priestly prayer in John 17:3, where Jesus confesses that the Father is the one God. Together, all these things suggest that the Father is the one God and is God with the Son and Spirit because they proceed from his person.

Is it nevertheless the case that 'the subjection of Christ to the Father in his incarnate economy as the suffering and obedient Servant cannot be read back into the eternal hypostatic relations and distinctions subsisting in the Holy Trinity?'⁹⁸ With this question we encounter a difficult issue: on what grounds do we accept the witness of scripture as the revelation of the dynamics of the persons that constitute the being of the triune God? More pointedly, if we accept Barth's axiom that what God is for us, he is in himself, as Torrance does, how then do we decide that certain things that God is with and for us are not proper to his being? If the gospel narratives witness to the dependence of the Son on the Father, narrate his confessions about his Father as the one God, and specify his existence as coming from his God and Father, how then do we justify a meta-logic of equality as identity? At its best, the doctrine of the Monarchy of the Father is an attempt to take scripture's witness to the missions of the Son and the Spirit as the truth about the order and nature of triune life. Given the witness of scripture, this doctrine suggests that the Son and Spirit proceed from the person of the Father and so have their place in the one being of the triune God in a relation of dependence on this same person.

⁹⁷ John 8:42, 13:3, and 16:27-8.

⁹⁸ *Doctrine of God*, 180.

T.F. Torrance clarifies the critical point: within the *ordo essendi* the Father comes first because the Son directs us to him and in virtue of his being the Father of the Son; the relation is irreversible and essential.⁹⁹ Although the Father comes first, the Son is not ‘less’ according to nature as there is no difference in being. This is guarded by the fact that the Father is the Father only with and in the Son. As Torrance rightly points out, ‘the Sonship of the Son belongs to the very Being of the Father and the Nature of his Fatherhood.’¹⁰⁰ Certainly this is right; what must be made clear is that there is no other being than the one constituted by their relationship. The Father has his being with and in the Son because the Son is begotten of the Father and has his being in relation to the Father. This is the case even, and especially, if the procession of the Son and Spirit is from the person of the Father. The mystery of this is that two persons proceed from another whose existence includes being their source, but is not actual without their procession.

In addition to this proper focus on the essential nature of this relation, Torrance’s insistence that the divine nature be described as personal and not generic, and the warning against dualist and subordinationist tendencies within this tradition is proper.¹⁰¹ Taking these warnings seriously, it must be made clear that this one person of God is the One God and the Father Almighty who receives his being from these two as he is in perichoretic relations of distinction and unity. This clarification is significant because it means that there is no Father who exists *alone*, nor is there a person who has his existence in *singularity*.

IV.3 Clarification through the notion of Conversation

The Torrance critique makes two things clear:

1. that the notion of the Mon-arche of the Father can lead to problems if the Father is described as God by himself or as a singular person;

⁹⁹ *Doctrine of God*, 137

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Jenson, *ST II*, 96 n. 3, follows both of these suggestions; he writes concerning the second possibility, ‘it must be acknowledged that much recent Orthodox theology undoes this insight. Building upon the more unfortunate possibilities of the Palamite doctrines of divine being and the “energies,” can lead to what the first volume of this work identified as an ironically appearing Orthodox modalism, it effectively subordinates the persons to both the divine being and work.’

2. that an improper focus on the identity of the persons or an over reading of the *homoousion* can confuse the personal distinctiveness of the Father if the distinction between the *hypostasis* and the *ousia* of the Father is not clearly maintained.

This leaves us with a question: how does Jenson's double identification of the Father relate to both potential problems? I would suggest that Jenson properly describes the particularity and uniqueness of the Father as the one God. Moreover, he does so while maintaining the essential focus on the relational nature of this person's existence. This comes about as Jenson follows the direction of scripture's witness to the Father that includes 'two cognate way [of referencing] the Godhead and...the Person of the Father.'¹⁰² First, he rightly notes the oddity of the way in which the Old and New Testament describe the Father as the one God. Second, he appropriates the witness of John that the one God is personal as the Father who has being with and from his only begotten Son and the Spirit. This means that the two senses of Father or the two ways in which he is identified are not elided; the monarchy of the Father does not obscure the personal actuality of the Father. Instead, it maintains this distinction by placing the two things in tension. In this description it is made clear that the Father exists and is a person as and only as he begets the Son and breathes the Spirit.

In addition to allowing the descriptions of scripture to dictate his conceptual framework, Jenson's basic definition of divine personhood implies that the Father's act of begetting the Son includes the Son's relation to the Father.¹⁰³ This comes about as Jenson focuses on the nature of relations as mutual converse. When he does so he describes the begetting of the Son as the speaking of a word. In this the word's personal actuality is specified as a response to or relation with the Father. As a result, there is no word and so no Son who exists without the Father. Likewise, there is no speaker whose speaking does not imply or require response and so relation. In sum, there is no Son who is other than the communicated logos of the Father. Crucially, there is no Father without his Son and Word. The Father's speaking of the responsive Word through the Spirit constitutes the Son and the Father's being. Ultimately, this means that the idea of the monarchy of the Father is set in its place by a strong

¹⁰²*Doctrine of God*, 181.

¹⁰³ For the following paragraph see *ST I*, 119.

conception of the perichoretic nature of the persons and their essential unity through mutual relations of address and response.

In his idiosyncratic way, Jenson's description of the Father includes two conceptualities that Alan Torrance argues are essential aspects of the ontologically primal communion of God: first, Athanasius' conception of interpenetration, and, second, Gregory of Nazianzus' focus on hypostatic relations. Jenson incorporates these aspects of the tradition, but does not do so in a way that overemphasise the identity of the persons. As a result, the particular characteristics of the Father as the community initiating person, and the Son as the speaking and responding word, and the Spirit as the liberating and empowering presence of God lead Jenson to emphasis personal distinctions that imply essential relation. This given, his logic of double-identification holds together a mysterious truth without obvious confusion.

According to T.F. Torrance the Cappadocian brothers developed problems, which lead to the overemphasis on the Father as the Monarch, when they interpreted the hypostases as modes of being and developed the distinction between the *ousia* and the *energia* of God.¹⁰⁴ This emphasis led to the conception of the three as distinct and equal persons who are unified in action. The thrust of Torrance's argument suggests that this focus undervalues the *homoousios* and obscures the identity of the persons. This is the case if the person's must be described as identical in deity. As I have argued this is not the case. The persons of God are not identical even though they are each truly and fully God. Instead, the persons are differentiated and distinct and are unified in and through their particular idioma because these imply ontological dependence and perfect mutuality.

This charitable reading of Jenson and the Cappadocians would be decisively defeated if the language of cause that is implied in this construction was used without semantic transformation. As T.F. Torrance admits, the Cappadocians attempted to mitigate the danger inherent in cause language by specifying that this chain of being was one of dependence.¹⁰⁵ If the dependence is multi-directional then the obvious danger of cause language is avoided. The Father causes the Son and Spirit to have being, but his being is likewise caused by the actuality of the Son and Spirit. In another context Jenson notes the danger implicit in causal language and asserts that 'the triune God does not and indeed cannot beneficently affect us causally; for him,

¹⁰⁴ *Doctrine of God*, 177.

¹⁰⁵ *Doctrine of God*, 178.

causal action, with its intrinsic distancing, would mean exclusion from himself and so cursing rather than blessing.¹⁰⁶ If this holds for our inclusion in the divine life, then certainly Jenson's use of causal language to describe the Son and Spirit's constitution of the divine life implies a semantic participation sufficient to make the term applicable. Moreover, such language must be at hand if we are going to take the witness of scripture to the procession of the Son and Spirit from the Father as more than merely metaphorical or purely mysterious language. If we are going to take the idea of begetting and breathing as language that describes the inner life of God, even if insufficiently, it must imply real dependence, real distinction, and an order of some sort where the Father has a priority in his personal freedom to be with and in the Son and Spirit.

V. Conclusion

The attempt to describe the persons and being of the triune God without abstraction beyond God's temporal identification shapes Jenson's *Systematic Theology*. As Jenson places trinitarian logic back in the context of the one biblical narrative, the plot of the narrative reshapes and reorients the logical counters of theology. This, for Jenson, is the way of all good theology that takes its trajectory from this good story. He explains that the way of theology is often 'to take a plain phenomenon of the gospel's narrative that causes difficulty in certain conceptual connections and remove the difficulty by adjusting not the narrative but the connections.'¹⁰⁷ In this chapter I have traced the way the way that Jenson rearranges the connection between the person of the Father and the unity of the triune community by following the peculiar descriptions of Scripture. In particular this has meant focusing on the double identity of the Father as the God of Israel and one person of the triune God. As was argued, this novel description of the Father attempts to take two basic descriptions of the Father and remove the conceptual difficulty of this pairing by rearranging the conception of personhood and personal identity. This experimental synthesis leads to a reformulated conception of the monarchy of the Father. Within this Jenson uses his conception of the persons of God and his description of the Father to avoid several problems that are common in the tradition.

¹⁰⁶ ST I, 311.

¹⁰⁷ ST I, 124.

For Jenson, beginning with the Resurrection and seeing it in the proper context of God's faithfulness to Israel necessarily leads to a shift in the way we identify God. This begins as we recognize the way in which God is present with and for Israel. It continues as we see the way in which God is identified by and with the actions that are the expression of faithfulness in this relationship. This historicizing of God is brought out in shift in terminology Jenson makes from triune *hypostaseis* to triune identities, which was noted above. Whereas Gregory of Nyssa discusses freely and at length the *hypostaseis* of the Father, Son, and Spirit there is little clarification of how these three are related to Jesus and the God of Israel and the Spirit of the Eschaton. The logical counters of Gregory's theology are practically separated from the narrative that describes each person as God. In contrast, Jenson attempts to develop a doctrine of the Trinity that clarifies how the one God known in his mutual agency in creation is triune. He attempts to define 'God's being from the beginning in trinitarian terms, and to carry through the thesis of the historicity of the being of God precisely in terms of his definition.'¹⁰⁸ This leads him the task of developing an adequate Trinitarian ontology, but initially leads him to describing the persons in their personal diversity.

Central to Jenson's trinitarian description and theological ontology is the assertion that the equality of the persons does not depend on their identity. The Father, Son, and Spirit are each God and distinguished in this by their particular ways of giving and receiving their personhood from each other. In the next chapter this focus on the hypostatic particularity of the persons becomes more concrete. This happens when we describe Jenson's identification of Jesus as the Son who with the Father and Spirit constitutes the one divine nature. This description depends on and develops Jenson's definition of hypostatic being. More importantly, it continues the task of describing the persons of God in light of the canonical witness to their distinctiveness. This will in turn lead to the task of thinking of these radically different persons as an infinite community whose being is in perfect relation.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ Jüngel, *God's Being is in Becoming*, 7.

¹⁰⁹ James J. Buckley, 'Intimacy: The Character of Robert Jenson's Theology' in *Trinity, Time and Church* ed. Colin Gunton (Grand Rapids and Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2000), 19, argues that Jenson's attempt to 'reinterpret being to accommodate the gospel' (*ST* I, 211-212) takes its cue from Nicea and modernity. He suggests that 'Jenson's metaphysics aims to say how God is identified by and with the temporal world by completing the traditional inward subversion of *ousia*, now in

relation to the modern reinterpretation of being as history, or time.’ Buckley rightly notes the role of the tradition; it might be asked if the modern reinterpretation of being causes this continued ‘inward subversion’ or whether this is driven by Christological reflection that notes and appropriates the oddity of the New Testament witness to the Son. Sifting out that question begins with the next chapter.

Chapter 3

Describing Jesus Christ as God with God

I. Clarity and Contentiousness

Jenson's identification of the triune God reaches its point of greatest clarity and contentiousness in his Christology. What becomes clear in "The Christological Problem" is Jenson's resolute focus on the person of Jesus Christ. This one who is born of the Virgin Mary and born again from the virgin tomb is essentially related to the Father as the Son of God and Christ of Israel. This human person, for Jenson, is the second identity of the triune God without remainder; there is no other hypostatic entity that exists eternally with the Father and the Spirit than the hanged man of Golgotha. By unambiguously identifying the protagonist of the gospel story as the second identity of God, Jenson's description of God becomes concrete and clear but also controversial.¹

Jenson's central contention is that the triumph of the triune God over sin and death took place directly in and through the life of Jesus of Nazareth. To elucidate and secure this basic claim this one life is described as determinative of his person and so constitutive of the triune God's being. This one person reveals who God is and how God is triune because he is God with God; Jesus Christ is simply and directly the Word of God. In other words, God is identified by and with Jesus Christ in the full plot and passion of his life. Consequently, description of God's eternal and essential being is controlled by this centre and concrete criteria. This life, and not the idea of a first cause or pre-temporal plenitude, reveals the way and freedom of the triune God. Beginning with this one person and so with the mutual act of the triune God, which has taken place with Him, Jenson describes the victor and his victory over sin.

Corresponding to this direct identification of the Son is a radically positive theology. Because he describes this person as God with God and argues that the persons constitute the divine nature Jenson eschews any definition of deity that would

¹ Rosemary Radford Ruether 'Can a Male Savior Save Women? Liberating Christology from Patriarchy' in *Introducing Redemption in Christian Feminism* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 82, poses an interesting question that Jenson's description of Jesus makes acute. Ruether's solution to the scandal of Jesus' particularity is to minimize his universal significance; Jesus is a good, but limited, example of the power to free others for liberation. For Jenson's answer to this question see 'The Father, He...' in *Speaking the Christian God*, ed. Alvin F. Kimmel, Jr. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 95-109.

qualify this confession. This methodological commitment means that Jenson's appropriation of Cappadocian trinitarianism takes an unusual shape. This comes about as the neo-Nicene logic that Jenson develops is placed in the context of the gospel narrative. When this happens the incarnate protagonist of the gospel narratives is identified as the Logos. In response to this it is asserted that this person constitutes the human and divine natures. This ontologically basic person is eternally *homoousios* with the Father and the Spirit. Likewise, this Son became man, suffered and died as a person who constitutes the human community. Just as he is God with God, this one and the same identity of God exists in relation to others as Emmanuel.

This revisionist reading of Trinitarian orthodoxy follows from and is intricately related to Jenson's critique of the Chalcedonian definition and the development of the two natures doctrine. Using his identification of the Son and the assertion that the persons are metaphysically primary, Jenson tries to move beyond subtly dualistic interpretations or uses of Chalcedon. Jenson's basic unease with this rule of faith concerns the function of *phusis* as it relates to the unity of the Son's agency and the directness of his relation to the Father. Nicene trinitarianism suggests that the *hypostasis* is constitutive of the divine nature and is therefore ontologically primal. In addition, the *hypostasis* of the Son is described in the Creed as the agent active in 'total divine saving history.'² Chalcedon could suggest an inverse relation. More precisely, it is possible to argue, in keeping with Chalcedon, that there are two generally determined and active natures that constitute the one *hypostasis* of the Son. Beginning with this clear and often noted conceptual problem, Jenson seeks to critique common readings of Chalcedon. As he does this he tries to remain within the negative limits that the definition of faith demands.

In this chapter this clear and contentious move to think of Jesus of Nazareth as God must be elucidated. To do this it is essential to recognize Jenson's driving task: to identify and describe the continuity of divine agency that in turn justifies reading the gospels as God's own self-determining story. Critical to this is the emphasis Jenson places on Jesus' agency within the framework of God's triune action. This direct focus on the person of Jesus leads Jenson to critique the way that the notion of impassibility has functioned within the tradition. It also leads to a critique of the way the idea of the Logos has determined christological thought. To begin we will clarify

² ST I, 132.

these critiques and demonstrate the relation of these problems to basic ambiguities in the rule of Chalcedon. After this we will describe Jenson's constructive contribution to trinitarian description. This comes about as Jenson describes the two natures in which Jesus participates in response to a basic description of scripture. After this it is necessary to situate Jenson's description of Jesus within the contemporary context and note several critiques of his identification of the Son.

II. Persistent Problems

In *Unbaptized God* Jenson characterizes the christological controversy as a showdown in which 'two irreconcilable versions of eternity, of time, and so of temporal continuity' remained in conflict.³ This was not a conflict in which one side had the right answer and was defending the orthodox faith against an external perverting tendency. Instead, this conflict persisted within both parties' theologies despite fundamental clarity 'within the doctrine of the Trinity,' where 'a mighty spiritual and intellectual feat had been done.'⁴ This feat, according to Jenson, was that 'the gospel had successfully and fundamentally reinterpreted Mediterranean antiquity's antecedent understanding of deity, bending it to the gospel's definition of eternity by a death and resurrection. But the Greek question, successfully met within the doctrine of God proper-or at least within the more strictly trinitarian part of it-merely moved to take up residence in a new Christological reflection which should have been precisely its critique. There it has not been overcome.'⁵

This description of an unresolved, internal, and ubiquitous conflict that indirectly perpetuates persistent problems is taken up and expanded by Jenson in his *Systematic Theology*. In short, this problem and the task of overcoming it by christological reflection set the course for Jenson's description of the Son. In and through this description Jenson argues that the life, death and resurrection of Jesus reveal the way of God as the way of triumphant love and infinite triune communion. Beginning with this life and the action that reveals this love Jenson critiques two aspects of the post-Nicene tradition: first, the way that impassibility remained the

³ Robert Jenson, *Unbaptized God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 122. Hereafter abbreviated, *Unbaptized God*, and page.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ *Unbaptized God*, 122

defining quality of deity, and, second, the way an un-biblical conception of the Logos controlled reflection about Jesus' relation to his God and Father.

II.1 The Persistence of a Primary Problem

At Nicea and again in the Nicene Creed it was settled that the Son is not a mere creature. This one and the same was not elevated to be like God, but is in fact God. This one whose life is bound by birth and death and by the triumph over sin in the Resurrection is divine. This central claim, according to Jenson, sits hard against the classic assumption that God is equivalent to impassibility. Like many contemporary theologians, Jenson suggests that the idea of impassibility is counter to the logic of the gospel narratives, the logic of trinitarian faith, and scripture's witness to God's personal actuality.⁶ This is because the notion in its strong sense implies that God is neither acted upon or affected emotionally by his creatures. At first glance, this basic description appears to be at odds with the gracious and compassionate God who met with and conversed with Abraham and Moses. It also appears to be at odds with the Lord's self-description as slow to anger, but nevertheless capable of anger.⁷ Additionally, this notion entails a particular definition of eternity and triune being that seems to qualify God's personal actuality.⁸ More precisely, impassability seems to contradict the basic metaphysical fact of Israel's faith, that God freely and graciously acts in time in new ways to identify himself with his people as perfectly personal and responsive. Finally, as Jenson notes, this assumption appears to contradict the Nicene

⁶ David Bentley Hart 'No Shadow of Turning: On Divine Impassibility,' *Pro Ecclesia* vol. XI, no 2 (2002) 185, writes 'that the Christian God is possessed of impassibility, or *apatheia*..., that he is impervious to any force-any pathos or effect-external to his nature and is incapable of experiencing shifting emotions within himself, seems to many a impossible proposition to affirm, one that is certainly *prima facie* incompatible with the biblical portrait of the God of Israel and that, even more certainly, is wholly irreconcilable with what Christians believe occurred in the suffering and death of Christ on the cross.' Hereafter abbreviated, *Apatheia*, and page.

⁷ Isaiah 63:6 is also typical, 'I trampled down peoples in my anger, I crushed them in my wrath.'

⁸ Alan Torrance, 'Does God Suffer? Incarnation and Impassibility' in *Christ in our Place: the humanity of God in Christ for the Reconciliation of the World* ed. Trevor Hart and Daniel P. Thimell (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1989), offers a concise overview of the issues in relation to the Incarnation, theism, and Christian theology.

confession that the Son ‘underwent gestation, birth, growth, a human career, rejection, torture, and execution as “true God.”’⁹

Impassibility means that God is impervious to external force,¹⁰ free from pathos or pain,¹¹ and so unchanging in his eternal actuality. Because God is perfect, it is argued that his essence is beyond change since this would imply acquiring or losing a form or degree of being. As David Bentley Hart explains the notion of impassibility was not understood exclusively in this purely apophatic sense, but was a nuanced notion used in a variety of ways to speak of God’s consistent and perfect goodness.¹² As such, Athanasius, the Cappadocians, and Cyril used the term to speak of God’s perfect action in the Logos. When used in this sense the word is either semantically transformed or used with great paradoxical force to speak of God’s action. As Jenson notes some in the post-Nicene context were willing to endure this paradoxical tension. Others were less willing and sought to sort things out more directly from the assumption that deity is absolutely equivalent to impassibility.¹³ In both cases an *a priori* assumption, that deity equals a quality that Christ must somehow possess to be God, creates a tension within theological logic.¹⁴

⁹ *ST*, I, 125.

¹⁰ *Apatheia*, 185.

¹¹ *Apatheia*, 193.

¹² *Apatheia*, 185-186.

¹³ The pervasiveness of this assumption and its particular perverting tendency is confirmed by Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Emergence of the Christian Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 265; he explains that ‘the early Christian picture of God was controlled by the self-evident axiom, accepted by all, of the absoluteness and the impassibility of the divine nature. Nowhere in all of Christian Doctrine was that axiom more influential than in Christology, with the result that the content of the divine as revealed in Christ was itself regulated by the axiomatically given definition of the deity of God. No one wanted to be understood as setting forth a view of Christ in which this definition was in any way compromised or jeopardized.’

¹⁴ Jürgen Moltmann *The Crucified God* trans. R.A. Wilson and John Bowden (New York: SCM Press, 1974), 228, states the matter with characteristic boldness; he suggests that if we remain within philosophical definitions of the divine nature then ‘the Platonic axiom of the essential *apatheia* of God sets up an intellectual barrier against the recognition of the suffering of Christ, for a God who is subject to suffering like all other creatures cannot be ‘God’.’¹⁴ The central point to grasp in this debate is that God does not suffer like us, but freely and graciously chooses to come among us and take our suffering upon himself in his lordly freedom; God’s being is not defined in negative abstraction from our suffering, but in the sovereign rule over our suffering and our disobedience.

To note this difficulty and suggest that God suffers in Christ or as Christ does not necessarily imply that evil is necessary for God to reveal his love and goodness.¹⁵ Nor does it imply that Christ is a passive object of the world's machinations. Instead, it implies that we must learn what God's exaltation, glory, freedom and impassibility look like in the light of the crucified and resurrected Son. In this sense, there is a place for impassibility within a baptised logic of God's triune being.¹⁶ For this reinterpretation to take place, the nature of Jesus' relation to the Father and his existence as the Logos of God must be made clear. To this latter issue we will now turn.

II.2 The Logos and the Structure of the Christological Problem

The second persistent problem that Jenson identifies within Patristic theology was that 'a biblical understanding of the Logos, as God's speech was not recovered.'¹⁷ As a result, the concept of the Logos, having been developed by Heraclitus and Plato and made sensible by the Apologist, continued to set the structure for christological reflection: In earlier dogmatic history this prevalent concept provided the basic way of understanding distinction and mutuality in God's eternal being by speaking of God's eternal self-reflection or thought as God.¹⁸ It also allowed Hellenistic Christians to speak of God's relation to the world in sensible terms so that God's rationality might be known, but not bound within creation.¹⁹ Despite these and other

¹⁵ Moltmann's axiom that God must suffer to love seems to imply this and so take a fateful step beyond what is given in light of Christ's life. See *The Crucified God*, 222.

¹⁶ T.F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997), 246-254, provides a nice example of how this is done in light of the startling truth that God is crucified.

¹⁷ *ST* I, 108.

¹⁸ Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Jesus, God and Man* (London: SCM Press, 1968), 164. Hereafter abbreviated *Jesus, God and Man*, and page.

¹⁹ Alasdair Heron, 'The Logos, Image, Son': Some Models and Paradigms in Early Christology' in *Creation, Christ, and Culture, Studies in Honor of T.F. Torrance* ed. Richard W.A. McKinney (Edinburgh, T&T Clark: 1976), 48-50, also suggests that the Logos helped the Apologist demythologize the description of Christ as God's Son. Eventually though the Logos comes to explain the term Son, and the later 'is subordinated to it. Thus 'Logos' has become a paradigm, that interprets and offers a basis for the concept of the Son.'(50)

benefits, the long-term problems of accepting this conception of God's speech outweighed the more immediate gains.

This was due to the inevitable propensity to divide the Logos, as a divine entity, from the human nature of Jesus. When this happens it is necessary to add an extra set of relations within the Godhead. In *Jesus God and Man* Wolfhart Pannenberg points out the heart of this problem and the effect upon the dogmatic tradition. He explains that due to the use of the Logos conceptuality 'there was a precarious loosening of the Son's divinity with Jesus of Nazareth.'²⁰ The effect of this is that it becomes possible to speak conceptually of God and his Logos with only superficial reference to Jesus. Instead of relating Jesus to his Father as the eternal Son, the task becomes relating Jesus or his human nature to the pre-existent Logos. In this conceptual framework the christological task is driven by the need to understand the relationship between two things, the natures of which are previously determined by a side-ways glance to general concepts. This is all the more difficult when a strong version of impassibility determines the definition of the Logos. In this mode of thinking the entity of eternal relation to the Father is determined in absolute separation from the gospel narrative of Jesus and all God's acts *ad extra*.

For Jenson, this framework, which determined the possibilities of the christological controversy, includes 'a shift and misstep.'²¹ The shift is two fold. First, thinking within this logic assumes that the active agent of the gospels is the Logos, whose existence is somehow identified and determined independently of the gospel narratives. Second, there is a shift to relating Jesus or the human nature to the second identity of the Trinity. Instead of thinking of this one and the same as the Word and Son, who is directly related to the first identity of God, it is necessary to relate the two natures within one person without confusion or separation. Ultimately, this is a misstep from the structure suggested by the Nicene confessions where the ontologically basic persons constitute the divine nature. In other words, there is a conceptual move from the oddity of the Creeds and scripture to a framework where deity is defined by aseity and impassibility. This comes about as the thought of God is related to God instead of relating the crucified and risen Jesus to God as God. This thought is then related to the human nature of Jesus that is a separate and ontologically basic entity. Jenson suggests that 'this construal of Christology, in its

²⁰ *Jesus, God and Man*, 165.

²¹ *ST I*, 127, n.6.

concern to protect Christ's deity from defilement, created a new and wholly artificial problem about his humanity.'²²

In light of Nicea there is a valid Christological question: how is Jesus the Son both God and Man? This is nevertheless a different question than the one formed in the christological controversy: how is the Logos related to the human nature? In so far as the Logos paradigm was assumed, the real tensions and problems of the patristic synthesis remained unchallenged. This is inevitably the case when the object of primary and determining reflection was the impassible Logos of the abstract God. In effect, this misconstrual of the relation of the Son to the Father reinforces the primary problem of defining God by impassibility.

This structure and these problems given, the task of relating two mutually opposed things was taken up by the Antiochenes and the Alexandrians. In and throughout the exchange of letters, the conflicting councils, and the political manoeuvring the Antiochenes were afraid that the Alexandrians were confusing the two natures. They suspected that Cyril and his followers were so focused on the hypostatic or real union that they were inevitably creating a third being, which was neither God nor Man. Their response was to sort things out more clearly and definitely assuming the existence of two concrete and distinguishable natures. Jenson reads the Alexandrian reaction as a sustained attempt to assure that nothing dishonourable was attributed to the divine nature. This was motivated 'by [an] almost frantic passion to protect God from contamination by [Jesus' humanity]'.²³ This led to a clear description of two distinct things in Christ that remain complete in themselves after the Incarnation. Reacting to this clarity, the Alexandrians feared that the Antiochenes were keeping separate two things that were in fact united when the Logos became flesh. They suspected that Theodore, like his student Nestorius, was attributing our salvation to the conjoining of a mere human with the empowering Logos. As a result the Alexandrians expected that the Antiochenes were positing two Sons, each with a distinct *hypostasis*. In turn they emphasized the single subjectivity of the Logos who assumed flesh to the end of redeeming the human nature that was really his.

²² ST I, 127.

²³ ST I, 126 n. 4. Jenson does admit that there is a possible exception in Theodore's thought, but only along one line.

Jenson's historical description makes it clear that neither side in this debate questioned the assumption that there are in fact two things that must be unified, which are *a priori* defined as qualitative opposites. No one asked what in fact determines our understanding of the divine and the human natures that are both real and really related in and by Christ. Although it was appreciated that the Cappadocians provided a way to relate the *ousia* and three *hypostases* of God, it was not appreciated that the second *hypostasis* in the Nicene creeds is the one Lord Jesus Christ. Nor was it appreciated that this basic confession clearly appropriates the gospel's basic and odd identification of the Jesus as the eternal Word and Son. As a result, the pre-existent and unincarnate Logos became the subject of Trinitarian reflection. This entity also became the subject of the Incarnation who must somehow be united to a nature that is real and really other than the Logos. According to Jenson's doctrinal narrative, neither of these Christologies, nor the conciliar attempt to bring the two together challenged this general framework. As a result of this shared flaw, the proposed solutions to this controversy failed to break new ground and offer a reconciling solution. Consequently, these two attempts to solve a dilemma were set in tension and different groups were given the right to lead separate but equal lives within a set of proper limitations.

III. Jenson's Critique of Chalcedon

The council of Chalcedon, according to Jenson, failed to break through to the basis of the Greek question and so failed to clarify the Christian confession. Despite this, Jenson notes that Chalcedon is effective in limiting the tendencies of these two opposed traditions. It is so because it stipulates several basic things:

1. that description of Jesus Christ must make it clear that this one is fully and truly God and Man, was born eternally of God and was born of Mary- Chalcedon guarantees that the Christian confession of Jesus as Lord will not go behind Nicea to posit a mediatorial being that is neither God nor man;
2. that Trinitarian and Christological terminology must be interconnected and used with consistency.

Despite these gains Jenson suggests that there is a latent problem: that one can read into or out of Chalcedon apparently opposite Christologies.²⁴ For Jenson both within definition and within the document as a whole there is insufficient clarity about the person and work of the one Lord and second identity of the Trinity. That Chalcedon failed to break new ground, reach a more definite and clear confession and so reconcile the ecumene leads Jenson to ask a simple question: where do we go from here? Before going on to look at his attempt to move forward, we need to pause and elucidate more fully Jenson's critique of Chalcedon.

III.1 The Nature of the Problem for Jenson

Jenson's critique of this patristic rule of faith focuses on the use of this term *hypostasis* in Chalcedon. It does not, he suggests, have the ontological gravity within the definition of Chalcedon needed to conceptualize the earlier rhetoric of 'one and the same Son.'²⁵ This is due to the lack of clarity within the definition concerning the relation of the two natures to the *hypostasis*. This lack of clarity, according to Jenson, is exacerbated by appending Leo's Tome to the definition, but is internal to the definition itself.

This ambiguity is made clear for Jenson in the contrast between the narrative and conceptual aspects of Chalcedon. In the first part of the definition it is one and the same Lord Jesus Christ who is confessed to be truly God and man. In this section it seems relatively clear that this one and the same person is born both of the Father

²⁴ This point is made clear in the different but related areas of current scholarship on and ecumenical reception of Chalcedon. Dorothea Wendebourg, 'Chalcedon in Ecumenical Discourse,' *Pro Ecclesia* vol. VII, no. 3 (1997), 321-4, explains that in contemporary discourse between the Eastern Orthodox and Orientals, despite a univocal preference for Cyril and his *mia-physis* formula, there is a definite difference on the question of whether Chalcedon can be read as a statement of Orthodox Christology, or whether it needs to be radically amended by Cyril's insights. Likewise, Patrick T.R. Gray, *The Defense of Chalcedon in the East*, (Leiden, E.J. Brill 1979), 1-16, nicely summarizes how different historical schools can come to opposite conclusions about the nature and make up of the definition of Chalcedon. Consequently they can conclude that Chalcedon was a victory for the Romans and the Antiochenes, the Tome of Leo, or was a compromise in which the agenda of the Cyrillians was respected but given a particular emphasis to accommodate the concerns of Antiochenes and Romans while guarding against Eutychianism. In both cases the ambiguity of Chalcedon is highlighted by the different ways in which aspects of definition and the document as a whole are interpreted or disallowed.

²⁵ *ST* I,132-3.

and from the Virgin Mary. This one and the same is the active agent of the gospels. Nevertheless, as there is a shift to the conceptual description of this agent it is clear that within this one person there are two natures. Moreover, these natures are described as maintaining their ‘distinctive character,’ which is exactly what the three *hypostaseis* do in constituting the divine nature in trinitarian theology.²⁶ This could suggest that the distinctive natures are active in the person and so in the saving history narrated in the gospels. As such, it is critical to know the relation of these two natures to the one person or *hypostasis*. As the definition stands it begs the question: What is ontologically significant in the sense of active and concretely determinative for this one person? In a sense, this is a way of asking about the nature of the union and the effects of the union. In another sense, this is a question about what makes a *hypostasis* or person real and a nature actual. Is the person of Christ an active agent or is it the case that there are two active entities within the one person?

For Jenson, Chalcedon’s answer to this last question is ambiguous. This is the case because the answer to the former question might be that there are two active entities in Christ. In effect, the insistence on the Antiochene language of ‘in two natures’ and the Leonite language about the natures cast doubt on the extent to which ‘in one *hypostasis* is a successful concept.’ In other words, the natures are defined in such a way that the person is an adjunct to two active and ontologically basic things. The effect, according to Jenson, is that ‘the repetition of one and the same is verbiage.’²⁷ Despite the intention of the council to make peace around the teaching of Cyril and the broad Cyrillian structure of the definition, the Antiochene conception of two natures *in* Christ and the use of Leo’s terms and phrasing spoil the clarity of the rule. Consequently, there remains fundamental lack of clarity about the way in which it is proper to speak about the agency of Christ or interpret the New Testament. This is necessarily the case as the Antiochene terms insure that the ubiquitous and problematic structure of the debates was formalized. The consequence of this ambiguity is the persistent possibility of dividing the one Christ and attributing the action of the gospel narratives to one of the natures that can be known in this one and the same Lord or *hypostasis*.

III.2 A Common Understanding of Nature

²⁶ *ST I*, 132.

²⁷ *ST I*, 132

Jenson's critique of Chalcedon's ambiguity is clarified by his description of key terms and their function in Antiochene and Alexandrian discourse. In this description Jenson suggests that both parties assumed a similar definition of nature. Likewise, he suggests that this common understanding of nature is implied in Chalcedon. Citing extensively from Theodore's Catechetical homilies Jenson suggests that the Antiochene understood *phusis* as 'an active personal entity.'²⁸ This definition given, the Incarnation is that the two personal entities of the human and divine nature are conjoined while "each remains the sole logical subject of the characteristics and actions appropriate to him."²⁹ In Christ therefore there are two natures, each fully and truly present: the Logos and the man. This conjunction allows for cooperation between the Logos and the man to the end of perfecting humanity. That this happens makes worship of this man with the Logos appropriate, as they will be one thing, the Logos, in the perfection of all things. In sum, there is a conjoining of the two natures in the Incarnation that is perfected in God's eternity. This allows for distinction in the acts attributed to the person. This in turn protects the perfect nature of the Logos in and throughout the work of perfecting humanity.

According to Jenson, this understanding of nature as an active entity was common. In fact, the strict Cyrillians, or monophysites, assumed that a nature was a concrete entity with the energy proper to it.³⁰ In addition, Jenson argues that Cyril, 'when he was formulating to his own conceptual taste,' understood nature to have a similar ontological gravity. The contrast between the latter two being that Cyril could allow for different language about the two natures, if the understanding of a concrete

²⁸ ST I, 127.

²⁹ ST I, 128. Jenson notes that 'in Theodore's commentary on John, this becomes simply bizarre: he goes through clause by clause, sorting out the narrative between what is done by the Logos and what is done by the man.' See note 11, ST I, 128. This is a good reminder that the debates themselves are about the ways in which we read scripture and talk about God as the Son. Neither the terms nor the terms of the debate about the nature of Christ exist in abstraction from the story of Jesus and the life that he lives with and for us.

³⁰ John Meyendorff, *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought* (Crestwood NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1976), 40 ff., offers a similar description of the Monophysite conception of nature and their disease with Chalcedon.

active entity was guarded by a certain understanding of the *hypostasis*.³¹ Jenson explains that in these situations Cyril could use the term nature in a more abstracted way. This was the case when it was necessary to distinguish between the characteristics of humanity and deity and their union in the one *hypostasis* of the incarnate Logos. In these contexts the ontological gravity of the single subject is determined by the use of the term *hypostasis* and the construction that Christ is *from* two natures.³²

In his letter to Succensus Cyril clarifies this. This happens as he specifies the way in which the language of two natures can be used to reflect abstractly on the single subject of the Incarnation. He explains that ‘we do no harm to that concurrence into union when we say that it took place out of two natures. After the union has occurred, however, we do not divide the natures from one another, nor do we sever the one and indivisible into two sons, but we say that there is One Son, and as the Fathers have stated: one incarnate nature of the word.’³³ This compact quotation demonstrates how Cyril is able to move from one use of nature to the other. At first he alludes to the two generally conceivable natures from which Christ is and then speaks of the actual Son who has one nature as a personally active entity. This is the type of conceptual flexibility that allowed Cyril to draft the formula of peace with John of Antioch. This was, according to Jenson, the ‘second kind of Cyrillian conceptuality to which the orthodox theological future belonged.’³⁴ Although the future of orthodox theology belonged to this conceptuality, it is difficult to concede that the definition of Chalcedon works with this type of conceptual flexibility and precision.

Commenting on this passage John Anthony McGuckin suggests that Cyril’s interpretation ‘marks a crucial difference with the line that Chalcedon subsequently takes, for Cyril is happy to accept the notion of “two natures” but feels that this needs

³¹ ST I, 130. Jenson cites the second letter of Cyril to Nestorius as an illustration of this conceptual form in the Alexandrians thought: ‘uniting...ensouled flesh to himself according to hypostasis [*kath’ hypostasin*], the Logos became man...’ ST I, 130, n 29

³² In this context Cyril’s concern is to guard the soteriological scheme of the Alexandrian tradition, which clarifies that God alone can act to save humanity by assuming flesh and redeeming those bound to corruption.

³³ John Anthony McGuckin, *St. Cyril of Alexandria : The Christological Controversy : Its History, Theology, and Texts* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994), 240. Hereafter, McGuckin, and page.

³⁴ ST I, 130.

qualification if it is to avoid a tendency towards the kind of separation that has been advocated by Nestorius. He wishes to speak of a concurrence to unity “from two natures” but does not posit a union that abides “in two natures.”³⁵ For Cyril, to abide in two natures means ‘to abide in an “un-united condition” that can only be theoretically applied before the incarnation takes place.’³⁶ This is due to the commonly assumed definition of nature that implies agency. Given the event of the Logos assuming flesh, it is therefore inappropriate to speak of the existence of two natures, except in abstraction from the reality of Christ who is an active *hypostasis*. That Christ is one in the actuality of his existence insures that the action of the Lord is the action of the Logos’ one *hypostasis*. Therefore, given the Incarnation and the action of Jesus Christ, the division that defines the relation of humanity to God is transcended. This happens as this one *hypostasis* emerges from the two natures to redeem human nature as a unified agent or *hypostasis*.

This focus on the agency of the Logos, who assumes flesh, is perfectly illustrated by Cyril’s favourite phrase for describing the Incarnation: the one nature, of God the Logos, that has been enfleshed. According to Jenson this phrase captures Cyril’s insistence on the single subjectivity of a concrete active entity and the eventful actuality of the Incarnation. In effect, Cyril understands the Incarnation as an event that happens to the Logos for our sake.³⁷ In this event there is one single subject who is fully human and fully divine. This one has two natures as he possesses all the attributes required to be God the Son and a particular human being. Jenson recognizes that ‘perhaps Cyril was not so clear on this precise point as one could wish,’ nevertheless he was able to speak of the one Son of God becoming human with conceptual rigor in two different ways. As a result he could do three things in two different ways;

1. secure the single agency of the savior;
2. speak of a real union or assumption;
3. recognize a theoretical distinction between the two natures from which Christ emerges.

³⁵ McGukin, 240.

³⁶ McGuckin, 240.

³⁷ *ST I*, 129-130.

Whether Cyril speaks of the one nature of the Logos or the one *hypostasis* from two natures, it is clear that there is a ‘continuity of divine agency throughout the gospel narrative.’³⁸

Such clarity about the agency of the Lord is not to be found in Chalcedon, unless the more abstract understanding of nature is assumed in the definition. This interpretation of nature is possible if the participle *gnorizomenon* is taken in Cyril’s sense of theoretically knowable as seen with the eyes of the soul. John Anthony McGuckin has argued that this is and must be the case.³⁹ However, this reading seems to overlook the clarity with which the natures are defined ‘as retaining their “difference of nature” and its “distinguishing character.”’ More obviously, it has to overlook the Antiochene contribution that the two natures are *in* Christ. As well this interpretation has to ignore the Tome of Leo as an orthodox way of interpreting the definition and the understanding of the natures as ‘agent of what is proper to it, working in fellowship with the other: the Word doing what belongs to the Word and the flesh what belongs to the flesh.’⁴⁰ That latter Orthodox thought and confession moved in this way to rule out such a reading is made clear at the fifth ecumenical council, which ruled out every reading of Chalcedon except a Cyrillian one.⁴¹ Nevertheless, the text as it stands seems to suggest the understanding of nature as an active entity, which Theodore, the monophysites and Cyril commonly presupposed. These factors recognized, it is difficult to suggest that Cyril’s conception of agency and unity is sufficiently developed in Chalcedon, or that an analogous possibility is present. Instead, it seems that Chalcedon persists in defining the two natures as ontologically basic and so as constitutive of Christ’s person. Because this is the case it remains possible to suggest that each nature is active in his person in different ways and at different times.

³⁸ *ST I*, 127.

³⁹ McGuckin, 240.

⁴⁰ *Epistola Papae Leonis ad Flavianum ep. Constantinopolitanum de Eutyche*, cited from *Decrees of the Eucemenical Councils*, ed Norma P. Tanner (Georgetown University Press, 1990), 1:79.3-7; translated and quoted by Jenson, *ST I*, 131.

⁴¹ Jenson, *ST I*, 133, n. 42, explains that ‘this is done mostly negatively, by excluding every possible Antiochene reading of Chalcedon.’ He rightfully and trenchantly adds that ‘some of the excluded readings look very much like they are the plain sense of the text.’

III.3 An Ambiguity of Agency

This ambiguity of agency suggests that the definition of Chalcedon secures a framework that could confuse the interpretation of the gospels and thought about the one person of Christ. Pointing out this unclarity, Jaroslav Pelikan suggests that there ultimately remains a question about ‘who the subject of suffering and the crucifixion was... Presumably, the references to “one and the same” near the beginning and the end would indicate that he, in the concreteness of his total person both divine and human, was the subject, but this was not specified.’⁴² Similarly, Jenson concludes that ‘although the texts speaks profusely of the ontological status of the two natures its final version, missing the ‘from’, provides nothing comparable about the one *hypostasis*.’⁴³ As a result, Chalcedon fails to specify that the incarnate Logos is active in and throughout the history that the gospel narrates. Essentially, the definition fails to specify that the *hypostasis* is the ontological concrete entity who is active as the one and the same Lord.⁴⁴ Ultimately for Jenson it seems that these features are instead attributed to the natures.⁴⁵ As a result, what is known about Christ is that two things, the human and divine natures, subsist in and behind one *prosopon*.

The total effect of this is that the relation and ordering of the *hypostasis* and nature in Chalcedon is in tension with ordering suggested by the Nicene Creed. The long-term consequence of this is that the humanity of Christ is seen as a problem that stands outside of the relation of the Son to the Father as stipulated in the Nicene confessions. The more immediate problem is a fundamental lack of clarity about how God is active in Christ for the salvation of the world. As a result, it remains possible to attribute the suffering and death of Christ to the second person of the Trinity, but only or merely according to the flesh that is distinct, even if not separate, from the

⁴² Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Emergence of the Christian Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 265.

⁴³ *ST I*, 132

⁴⁴ This is the opinion common to contemporary the Orthodox and Oriental representatives in and throughout recent ecumenical conversations. See Dorteia Wendebourg, “Chalcedon in Recent Ecumenical Dialouge,” *Pro Ecclesia* vol. VII, no. 3 (1997), 322. She explains that from the position of the Orthodox and Orientals the formula ‘in two natures’ ‘was adopted as the conceptual expression of an alien concern in opposition to the position of the Cyrillian majority.’ This was the case despite the fact that the council ‘was overwhelmingly disposed in favor of Cyril and taught accordingly.’ *ibid*, 321.

⁴⁵ *ST I*, 132.

divine nature. Likewise, it is possible to assert that the Logos raised Jesus from the dead as each nature acts in its characteristic manner. These last two points given, it seems possible to confess that the human nature, not God, is active in saving humanity at the two points of dramatic decisiveness in the gospels. If the human nature works what is appropriate to it and so dies and is raised again by the impassible and active Logos, then the tension of the gospels and the oddity of the trinitarian confession is mitigated by this latter rule of faith.

Does the gospel lack clarity at these points? Is it not the Father who raises the crucified Son in the Spirit, who will raise us in the last day? And, is it not clear that the high priest of the confession, Jesus the Son of God, learns obedience and is perfected through the things he suffers, not in freedom from them? And if this is so, can it be the case that the convergence into union was reversed or suspended at the chief moment of the saving history of God with man? Such questions suggest that further clarification is required to identify the Christ who saves us, the one with whom we are identified, and the one by whom we are ruled. The clarity of the Trinitarian confessions and the identity of the Church necessitate such clarity and the gospel of the one Lord Jesus invites it.⁴⁶

V. Jenson's Constructive Continuation

To construct a Christology within the bounds, but beyond the limitations of Chalcedon, Jenson goes forwards and then backwards in the history of doctrine. First, he goes forward from Chalcedon following the path of Maximus. He then takes a familiar path backward to Nicea and the Cappadocian framework within which a hyper-Cyrillian Christology can make sense. This leads Jenson to a redefinition or re-

⁴⁶ Christoph Schwobel, 'Christology and Trinitarian Thought' in *Trinitarian Theology Today* ed. Christoph Schwobel (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), 113-146, deftly and convincingly argues that the church's language about God in Christ is in crisis because the trinitarian logic of the gospel and creeds have been obscured by improper divides between the historical and ultimate, the past and present, and being and meaning. Essentially, Schwobel argues that to speak fully of Christ's humanity even in its temporal and historical aspects includes the dynamic of self-identification of God in the reality of human life. This cuts against the logic of christologies from above and below and begins reflection with Christ who meets us in created reality as God with us and for us.

conceptualizing of the divine and human natures. The point of this is to accommodate the scriptural witness to the second person of the Trinity within a technical christology. Jenson tries to do this by making two things clear:

1. that Jesus is the Son and Word of the Father who is the primary agent of our salvation;
2. that this one and the same person constitutes the divine nature with the Father and the Spirit.

To do both of these things Jenson uses the tradition by appropriating and extending common insights in creative ways.

This development brings the positive and direct method of Jenson in to sharpest contrast with the tradition. This difference is clearly illustrated by the ease with which traditional theologies move from the economic to the immanent trinity or from the eternal to the incarnate Son. In one context the gospel narratives determine description of the persons of God; in the other, negative reflection about God's abstract freedom determines description of another Father, Son, and Spirit. Whereas the tradition has assumed that the divine nature of the Son is determined in relation to the Father in a timeless eternity, Jenson is working with a contentious assumption: that the relation of the incarnate Son to the Father in created time determines the divine nature and God's eternity. This difference is more precisely illustrated by the bluntness with which Jenson interprets the confession that Jesus Christ *is* Lord. In Jenson's conceptual framework this 'is' of the confession must be understood as a statement of strict identity. Whereas Chalcedon suggests a synthetic understanding of this confession, Jenson suggest that the gospels and Nicene confession make it clear that the one and the same Son is God as this human person.⁴⁷

Jenson begins his description of the Son with a simple reminder that reveals this directness: 'these "natures" and so forth are not to be counters in an independent metaphysical exercise. In christological context all are- or ought to be-analytically different ways of referring to Jesus as the Son. What Christology is – or ought to be-about is the Jesus who appears in the Gospels, as he is in fact the Son of God he was

⁴⁷ Jenson makes this clear in 'Jesus and the Trinity,' *Pro Ecclesia* vol. 8, no. 3 (1999), 312. Hereafter abbreviated, 'Jesus and the Trinity,' and page: This is the point of greatest clarity and contention by which Jenson's project hangs. This is not surprising as it is from this centre that all things either become clear and rightly known or are confused and obscured. There either is or is not another Son than Jesus who is the Christ that is primally with the Father and Spirit in eternity.

accused of claiming to be.’⁴⁸ In addition, this simple reminder subtly reveals the tradition within which Jenson is working, the neo-Chalcedon tradition that developed after 451 in defence of Chalcedon.⁴⁹

David Yeago summarizes the aims, method and achievements of this tradition cogently.⁵⁰ He suggests that the aim was to interpret Chalcedon in light of Cyril’s basic insights. This was done by explicitly applying the subtle distinction between *hypostasis* and *ousia* as developed by the Cappadocians to Christological thought. The end of this was the developed notion of ‘union with respect to *hypostasis*.’ This notion allowed for a strict identification of the Logos with Jesus of Nazareth while allowing for subtle analytic descriptions of his participation in two natures. The critical assumption of this tradition, as clarified by Yeago, is that ‘the subject matter of Christology is not ‘natures’ and their possible or actual syntheses, but rather a person, Jesus of Nazareth, who is confessed to be the Son of God.’⁵¹ This one *hypostasis* of the Logos is the given in light of whom the natures and their unity and distinction are clarified. Applying this shift in logic and working within this tradition, Jenson describes the single subject of the Gospel narratives as the incarnate Logos. When he does so the Son is described as God and man without abstracting from Jesus Christ. To make this clear Jenson appropriates and extends the thought of Maximus.

IV.1 Going Forward with Maximus.

In “Jesus and the Trinity” Jenson suggests that ‘at Chalcedon the history of Christology had just gotten to the interesting bits.’⁵² According to Jenson, this was because the concerns of Cyril were not really met at Chalcedon, which ‘his more percipient disciples saw quickly.’⁵³ Jenson continues and explains that this history went on in the East then to a ‘succession of controversies-monophysitic, theopaschite,

⁴⁸ *ST I*, 134.

⁴⁹ Jenson states this explicitly in ‘Jesus and the Trinity,’ 315. For an introduction to this tradition and the development of the term within scholarship see Demetrios Bathrellos, *The Byzantine Christ* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 34-35. Hereafter abbreviated *Byzantine Christ*, and page.

⁵⁰ David S. Yeago, ‘Jesus of Nazareth and Cosmic Redemption: The Relevance of St. Maximus the Confessor,’ *Modern Theology* vol. 12 no. 2 (1996), 166-167. Hereafter abbreviated ‘Jesus of Nazareth and Cosmic Redemption,’ and page.

⁵¹ ‘Jesus of Nazareth and Cosmic Redemption,’ 166.

⁵² Robert Jenson, ‘Jesus in the Trinity,’ 314.

⁵³ *Ibid*.

monoergistic, monothelitic and iconoclastic' which in the West are often considered to 'mark the beginning sad decline of the Eastern churches, of their captivity to scholastic hair-splitting and imperial religious politics.'⁵⁴ It is out of this succession of 'controversies' that Jenson draws on the thought of Maximus, who for his clarity about the single subject of the gospel narratives was later called the Confessor.⁵⁵

Maximus' clarity, according to Jenson, came about as he saw that Jesus' decision to suffer and die in obedience to the Father includes a human ascent to God by Christ.⁵⁶ This can and must be the case because of the possible difference between Jesus' will and the Father's as revealed in Jesus prayer, 'that your will not mine be done.' This will belongs to the human nature of Christ, according to Maximus, and as he has this and the divine nature there must accordingly be two wills in Christ.⁵⁷

To explain this Jenson uses Maximus description of Christ's two wills. First, he suggests that will as a faculty belongs to nature.⁵⁸ Therefore, Christ's divine will belongs to what the Father, Son and Spirit are together as the one God. *What* he is as divine entails that he with the Father and Spirit has the divine will. More specifically, Jenson notes that for Maximus Christ's divine will means that he 'has one good pleasure with the Father and the Spirit.'⁵⁹ In sum, Christ's divine will, like his participation in the divine nature, is not an individually possessed entity. Instead, his subsistence as the Son is identical to having the nature and will of God; as the Son he has no decisions to make about the will he has with the Father and the Spirit in one communal pleasure.

Next, Jenson notes that because the Son is the man Jesus he does, according to Maximus, have decisions to make about the Father's will. *What* he is as a human person necessarily includes the capacity to make decisions about God's will. As was

⁵⁴ 'Jesus and the Trinity,' 315.

⁵⁵ This dependence is appropriate given current scholarship; according to Yeago, 'Jesus of Nazareth and Cosmic Redemption,' 166, 'Maximus was the inheritor, and I would say perfecter' of the Neo-Chalcedonian tradition.

⁵⁶ *ST I*, 134.

⁵⁷ Bathrelllos, *Byzantine Christ*, 117-174, offers an in depth discussion of Maximus' Christology as it was clarified in his defense of Christ's two natures and two will; Bathrelllos also offers extended summary and analysis of the related scholarship.

⁵⁸ David Yeago, 'Jesus of Nazareth and Cosmic Redemption' 172-177, explains that, for Maximus, will and energy as capacity both belong to nature, but are actual only with respect to hypostases. Nature, energy and will are therefore manifest in the single agency of the hypostasis who does divine things humanly and human divinely. (175)

⁵⁹ *ST I*, 135.

noted above, there is a decision that is real and really difficult for the Son in his ascent to Father's will. Jesus does the Father's will and not his own will in taking the cup and bearing the sin of humanity. Although he stutters, he does not pull back. At this point, Yeago explains that 'the words "let this cup pass from me,"' according to Maximus, 'demonstrate that Jesus had a natural human will...But the total utterance...displays the *tropos* [how] of the union of divine and human in a single subject, the Son of God.'⁶⁰ In other words, Jesus' words and action offer two distinct perspectives on his personal actuality. They reveal that he acts with the Father and Spirit in perfect mutuality and that he does so as a truly human person. Jenson summarizes both trains of thought and suggests that 'as our salvation is willed by God, it is willed jointly by the three persons; as it is willed individually by Christ, the choice is a human choice.'⁶¹ The effect of this, according to Jenson, is that the historical and human agency of the Lord is properly acknowledged and conceptualized by Maximus in a technical christology for the first time.

This happens as Maximus makes two things clear. First, Jesus is *what* we are as humans; his decisions are individual decisions made in the operation of his will as a personal agent. Therefore, these decisions can be described in a general way as a human decision. Second, he is what we are, but is so differently in the way he is and does the Father's will as the Son. In other words, *how he is* distinguishes him as a person in two ways. His characteristic action reveals that he is the Son in relation to and distinction from the Father. Additionally, his action reveals that he is different from all other human persons. In Jenson's words, this is the case because 'his human life occurs at all, with whatever he is and does, only as there occurs the divine identity called the Son, only as there is in God this second 'mode of having being.'⁶² This one person who has this way of being acts in a human way to do divine things and in a divine way to do human things. In the complexity of this he is known as a person who participates in and constitutes two natures as fully God and truly man.

Using this type of logic to distinguish between Jesus' *logos* and *tropos* Maximus can conclude that 'his act of willing is, as a describable act, exactly as ours; but its ontological qualification transcends ours and is divine.'⁶³ *What* Jesus is as a

⁶⁰ David Yeago, 'Jesus of Nazareth and Cosmic Redemption,' 191 n. 39.

⁶¹ *ST I*, 135

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ Maximus the Confessor, *Opuscula*, 91:60C; quoted in *ST I*, 136-6.

particular person includes his relation to God the Father and the Spirit and his distinct relations to us. What he is reveals his capacity as a person to be in relation and to be actual as a person in two sets of relations, with the Father and Spirit and with us. He is an agent that can act, in perfect unity with the Father and the Spirit, and as a particular human person. However, *the way* he is as the Son distinguishes him from his Father and Mother; the uniqueness of his person, which is actual only in the union with respect to *hypostasis*, sets him off from persons divine and human.⁶⁴ Again, his distinct mode of being or his characteristic action reveals his uniqueness that distinguishes him in the human and divine community as a distinctly unique person. He is known as God and man in and through his action. This action or mode of being distinguishes him without separation from the two communities in which he lives, moves and has his being.

The implication of this, according to Jenson, is that Jesus' decision 'in the garden and elsewhere is a proper human decision, but one that only *occurs* as God the Son's actuality in the triune life.'⁶⁵ In other words, the Son's actuality in the triune life occurs as there is one *hypostasis* who is from two natures, who acts as a single subject, and who responds in obedience to the Father in the power of the Spirit. At this point it is critical to note the focus on the eventful actuality of the Son who is only and ever known as Jesus Christ. This one and the same person acts with and for us as a particular agent. In addition, his actions are abstractly describable with reference to two natures. Within this, these natures are never active in themselves or by themselves. Consequently, what we know is the person who exists in the union of two natures as one person. Because of his personal particularity it is possible and inevitable that the natures are recognized as distinct and unconfused, and united without separation.

This description of Christ's two wills and Jenson's conclusion about the occurrence of the Son depends on a certain conception of the *hypostasis*. According to Jenson, this is revealed in the way that Maximus affirms and expands the neo-Chalcedonian formula that 'the natures are those "from which he is and in which he

⁶⁴ David Yeago, 'Jesus of Nazareth and Cosmic Redemption,' 172-7, lucidly clarifies the tropos/logos distinction, which Jenson refers to as the how and what of Jesus Christ, as it was used by Maximus to distinguish the two natures and describe the single agency of Christ. For secondary references to this critical distinction see 'Jesus of Nazareth and Cosmic Redemption,' 190 n. 28.

⁶⁵ *ST I*, 136

is.”⁶⁶ This formula was devised by the second council of Constantinople to safeguard Cyril’s understanding of nature, as was described in section II. To these two members Maximus adds the conclusion ‘which he (simply) is.’⁶⁷ So, for Maximus, the one person of Jesus is from two natures, and in two natures and is so as God and man. The one person Jesus is human and divine; he is each and both of the natures as the one *hypostasis* of the Logos. As such, his willing is perfectly human as he painfully works out our salvation in the garden. Additionally and crucially, his willing is perfectly divine as it occurs in the perfect mutuality of the triune life. That this one decision is from both natures can be known abstracting from the one decision of Jesus Christ who is God and man. In sum, Maximus is clear that there is one agent of our salvation in whom there are two natures, who is from two natures, and who is simply God.

IV.2 Going forward beyond Maximus

In shifting from Maximus to Jenson’s description of the Son it is critical to note that this one person or *hypostasis* is not first divine and then human. Nor is he human and then divine. In the one case of Jesus, it is impossible to speak of a merely human person. This one person is simply and always the Son. Jesus does not alternate between the two natures or simultaneously live a human and divine life. He is the one person who is from the divine and the human natures. He is the one agent who lives in the triune life through the Spirit as he is the Son of the Father. Here the Cyrillian from two natures stands. Because of this Jenson is able to look at one subject and theoretically explain the way in which this active agent is the Son of Mary and the Son of God. As he does so the Cyrillian or neo-Chalcedonian conceptuality is upheld and subtly shifted.

It is upheld in so far as it is the Logos who is the one agent active for us and our salvation. However, for Jenson, this Logos simply is the human person Jesus. The directness with which Jenson asserts this takes up the neo-Chalcedonian tradition, but shifts it to an emphasis more appropriate to the gospel. This happens as Jenson draws out the conclusions of Maximus’ insights. From Maximus Jenson appropriates

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Jenson cites as an example Ambigua, 1:1052D. For a more full description of Maximus use of this phrase see *Byzantine Christ*, 108-110.

the basic conclusion that there is one hypostatic actuality of the Logos that is from two natures as one person. More precisely, Jenson explains that ‘the Logos as a triune identity is a *tropos huparxeos*; that is, he is a subsisting relation to the Father, the subsisting relation of being begotten.’⁶⁸ There is one person, the Logos, who has a characteristic way of being in relation to humanity and to the Father and Spirit. Appropriating the oddity of the gospel witness Jenson concludes that ‘the second identity of God is directly the human person of the Gospels, in that he is the one who stands to the Father in the relation of being eternally begotten by him.’⁶⁹

In contrast with Jenson the tradition could speak of a human nature that was assumed by the second person of God. In the development of the neo-Chalcedonian tradition this proposition led to the insight that the human nature is enhypostatically related to the divine nature of the word. It is suggested that this human person exists and acts because the eternal and unincarnate Word takes up a foreign nature. This is done to bring this nature to what it could not be on its own. As the human nature is assumed it becomes the human nature of the Logos; it therefore has no existence on its own. Because the hypostatic union is a relation of perfect unity and upholding, the human nature is anhypostatic. This subtle logic allows the neo-*Chalcedonian* tradition to affirm that there are two natures in Christ. For Jenson, the relation of dependence and empowering is more intra-trinitarian and so more direct. The human person Jesus of Nazareth is dependent on the Spirit to be the Son of the Father. He relates to the Father and the Spirit as the Son and so as a person is always divine; he is never merely a human person, but relates to the Father as the Son in the Spirit and so is the Word.

The clearest example of this identification of the Word as Jesus is Jenson’s reading of the prologue of John.⁷⁰ In effect, Jenson reads the prologue in light of the gospel that it introduces. As a result, he holds together the assertion that the Word was with God and the statement on Jesus’ lips, ‘before Abraham was I am.’ The effect of this is that Jenson bends the conception of Logos back towards the biblical idea of God’s spoken Word. The one who is born of Mary is this Word who becomes

⁶⁸ *ST I*, 136.

⁶⁹ *ST I*, 137. David Yeago, ‘Jesus of Nazareth and Cosmic Redemption,’ 190 n. 22 and 25, suggests that in Maximus ‘all God’s dealings with the world, including creation, the Logos is identified with Jesus of Nazareth.’ Jenson’s conclusion beyond Maximus is that the Logos simply and directly is Jesus of Nazareth.

⁷⁰ For the following see *ST I*, 139-40.

in time what he was, is and will be in God's eternity: the human person Jesus. In light of this vital insight, Jenson's description of the Son as the Word makes the neo-Chalcedonian paradigm shift more radical and more simple. The Church worships the one person Jesus Christ who is the Son as the Word. This one exists in a particular mode of being with the Father in the Spirit. He is the one who with the Father and Spirit created all things and who makes the Father known. This one speaks what he hears from the Father, does what he sees the Father doing, and comes as one sent by the Father. He does all of his work in obedience to the Father and in dependence on the Spirit, not in relation to the Word.

In Jenson's description of the Word and Son it is 'the aggressively incarnate protagonist of the gospel narrative' that is one with the Father. This one is the Word because he is spoken by the Father in the Spirit. The Word does not dwell or tabernacle in the flesh of this one person, but instead dwells among us. This person has his being with us as he has his being with the Father in the Spirit. He comes as this human person to dwell among humanity that is flesh, as it is that which is broken and ruled by sin to the end of death. In coming to this conclusion Jenson recognizes that he 'draws out the last consequence of Maximus' formulas, and so leave(s) Maximus, for he never drew them himself.'⁷¹ What Jenson concludes is that the active *hypostasis* is the human person who is related to the Father through the Spirit as God; Jesus Christ is the sole and exhaustive identity of the Son. Jesus Christ is from two natures, he participates in two natures, and is God.

As Jenson attempts to do absolutely positive theology from the naked narrative he resists counter-to-fact speculation. As a result, he concludes that this one and the same human person is the Son. Regardless of what might have been, the Father chooses to have this Son and to have him live this life in the Spirit and to raise him in the Spirit and into the Spirit. And so, Jenson can conclude his description with the affirmation that 'without obfuscation that the one person, God the Son who is Jesus, suffered.' Likewise he can continue: 'we are also free to affirm the other side of the "communion of attributes" with equal simplicity:⁷² this same person, Jesus

⁷¹ ST I, 136

⁷² John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 109, n.107, notes that the Neo-Nicene ontology that he develops should place the issue of the *communicatio idiomata* in a new framework. This happens in Jenson's theology as the *communicatio idiomata* appears as a secondary issue subordinated to the reality of the person Jesus Christ.

who is God the Son, bears among us the power of God.’⁷³ This one and only Son constitutes the divine nature with the Father as he lives in and into the Spirit.

Likewise, Jesus Christ graciously constitutes the human nature as the creator who is a creature. This one person is a *hypostasis* who participates in two natures, is from both natures, and simply is Jesus the Son, the God-man.

IV.3 Going Backward to the Cappadocians

In this section it is not necessary to rearticulate the totality of Jenson’s appropriation of the Cappadocians. Here, it is only necessary to note again their attempt to think of the being of the triune God as constituted in the mutual life of the Father, Son, and Spirit. Following from this it is essential to show the end to which Jenson applies this logic of mutuality. Therefore, it should suffice to note a major premise and a subsequent deduction as a reminder of the Cappadocian’s essential contribution. The major premise is the way in which the *hypostaseis* of the divine persons are made constitutive of deity by the Cappadocians. This leads to the deduction that the divine being is not as Aristotle defined true being residing above and beyond the particulars of substantiation. Instead the *ousia* of the triune God exists in and through the particularity of the three persons of God and their mutually constituting relations. The being of God is not above and beyond the particularities that mark the one off from the other two, but is actual in and through the relationships of these particular persons. Herein the persons constitute the one divine nature. This given, it seems to follow that there is no nature to exist in Christ, as this one constitutes the nature itself with the Father and the Spirit

This Neo-Nicene conception of being necessarily redirects the way in which any nature is conceived as actual. Most importantly, it is not essential in ontological reflection to abstract from the particularity of any substantiation to define the nature. Nor is it necessary to look behind, above or through the person of Christ to see the divine nature. Instead, it is in and through the relations of one divine person with the other two that the divine life is real and the divine nature is really substantiated. This given, the divine nature should be conceived by looking at the confession of the three persons of the Father, Son, and Spirit and not in any way by furtive glances to other

⁷³ *ST I*, 144.

criteria or other sources. Here for Jenson, there is simply no need for negative theology to correct any conception of the divine nature, qualify description of the Son, or provide the ground of God's freedom. Instead, it is essential to focus on the *economia* to do constructive *theologia*, even or especially where the divine nature is concerned. More concretely, it is essential to hear of Jesus, his Father and the Spirit to conceive of the one nature that these three distinct persons constitute and so equally and mutually possess.

IV.4 Going beyond the Cappadocians

Jenson's direct and analytical method attempts to avoid two problems concerning the christological concept of nature: first, the tendency towards unhelpful abstraction, and, second, the tendency towards disastrous concretion. Both of these tendencies can be recognized in Chalcedon where the nature is defined in unhelpful abstraction from Jesus Christ and then becomes a concrete particular in Christ. In contrast to this, Jenson uses a more positive and explicitly trinitarian approach. In this conceptual nexus the divine and the human natures are communal concepts given by joint possession.⁷⁴ The Father, Son and Spirit are each equally and fully divine as they together have one nature and so constitute the divine *ousia*. This mutuality is revealed in their mutual action in creation by which and with which they are identified. This one life has its beginning in the Father and end in the Spirit as it includes the full life of this one human person who lives in perfect communion with the Father in the Spirit. This one person is therefore God as he exists in this set of relations. Additionally and crucially, he does not need to abstract from his particularity as the Son of Mary to do so. Likewise, Christ's human nature is his full participation in the human community as the Son of God. As he lived and lives in relation to those he came to save, he constitutes with them a second nature. This nature is fully real for the person of Christ. In both cases the way of proper ontological reflection begins with Jesus Christ who is God as he is with God through God.

Within this triune life the man Jesus is the Logos who is the second person of the divine nature. It is not the case therefore that the Logos is an entity who has

⁷⁴ Jenson also argues that these persons instantiate this nature as they exemplify the infinite character of the triune love. See *ST* I, 220 ff, for this distinct use of nature.

something that must be related to a complete human nature that is something else. As Aristotle argued, two such complete things of different natures cannot be made one.⁷⁵ Appolinarius followed this same logic to assert that the Logos, who is of one nature, united to himself a human body without a soul. By avoiding the idea of a full human nature he avoided Aristotle's condemnation. Nestorius provides an example of the other heretical extreme in so far as he posited two active natures that are conjoined in one person. However, within an ontology guided by the Cappadocians such a choice between two extremes is simply not necessary, nor is it necessary to qualify the confession that Jesus is fully God and Man. This is because one person could be *from* or participate *in* two natures as one *hypostasis*. As an ontologically basic person Jesus is both God and Man. If Jesus is this one person who participates in two sets of relationships and so has two natures, then his actuality as the Word of God is not something added to his human actuality or something separate from it. This ontology and this identification of the Son given, the choice to reside within the Antiochene structure for Christology is not necessary. Moreover, if the three persons of the confession determine our conceptions of deity the question of impassibility is secondary. This is because the language of two concrete natures in Christ is pre-empted by understanding the one person of Christ as constitutive and determinative of the divine nature and the human nature.

According to Jenson, it is simply not the case that we know of two general natures with definite characteristics and actions appropriate to each nature. Instead, there is one person who exists in two sets of relations or communities or histories. This one and the same Son makes God's way of being clear and his nature known. This is possible because he is in the Father and the Father is in him. In response to this truth Jenson describes the one person Jesus as an identity of the triune God and the second identity of the triune God as an identity of the human community. Because of this development it is critical to ask how Jenson describes the mediation of these two relations. For Jenson, the two natures are not confused as the two communities are not confused, but are mediated in a 'hypostatic union' through the one person of Jesus. To appreciate this it is helpful to elucidate his description of the dynamics of mediation and as it relates to the suffering servant of Israel.

⁷⁵ To the immediately following see Pannenberg, *Jesus, God and Man*, 287.

VI.5 An Illustration of Mediation

Jenson's 'spiritual exegesis' of Isaiah's servant songs clarifies the way in which he understands the basic dynamics of personal mediation. This means that his reading of Isaiah is clarified by his notion of Christ's participation in two natures. It also means that his description of the Son is clarified by his reflection on the servant's role in Israel.⁷⁶ Jenson explains that 'Israel is the Servant and the community to be served by the Servant. The Servant is Israel and one within Israel who, for Israel, is what Israel is.'⁷⁷ This uniqueness within community allows for a distinction to be made between the servant and those served, who are together saved by God. On the one hand, this person mediates God's goodness and faithfulness to Israel as he is identified by and with God. On the other, this person is a member of this same community who can be identified by and with and as this community. In this the servant is identified by and with Israel and by and with God. As a result, this person can stand in between Israel and God as a distinct person in relation.

This same dynamic of unity and distinction pertains in Jesus life since he is the servant of God and is God with God. The implication of this is clearly displayed in Jenson's understanding of Israel's final hope: 'If Israel is to be a participant of the divine life while the difference between God and creature is maintained there must be...a difference between an Israelite who stands over against Israel and the people without whom this one is not himself.'⁷⁸ This possibility becomes actual, according to Jenson, in the *totus Christus*, 'meaning the risen Christ including and included in his community.'⁷⁹ This basic notion asserts that Christ is himself in relation to and distinction from his human community or body. He stands in this community and above this community and does so as the Son who stands under the Father in the Spirit as God. Because he is a person in relation through both of these communities he has a particular hypostatic actuality that can mediate the Father's presence to his brothers and sisters, without whom he is not himself. In turn, he can bring these same human persons with and in his person to the Father without making them divine persons.

⁷⁶ This mutual enlightening is made possible by a certain conception of history in which the telos of all things shapes the history in which this end eventually appears.

⁷⁷ *ST I*, 81.

⁷⁸ *ST I*, 83.

⁷⁹ *ST I*, 81.

In this nexus of relations there is an identity with and a distinction of the crucified and risen Christ and his people.⁸⁰ Likewise, there is an identity with and a distinction of the crucified and risen Christ and his Father who raises him by the power of his Spirit. In this way, for Jenson, there is one who faces the Father for the community and one who faces the community with the Father; likewise, there is one who dies and the community for whom the death occurs. Again, there is one person of God to die and one person of God in relation to whom this end is accepted. Finally, there is the sinful community and the one by whom and with whom they are identified as sinless. Likewise, there is Christ who is ‘the chief among sinners’ who stands over and against the community as the righteous Judge and Son of the Father and with the community before the Father.⁸¹

Jenson’s Christology is direct and demanding. Because he begins with the concrete descriptions of the biblical narrative and the Son’s actuality revealed therein his identification of God is creative and contentious. This methodological directness led to understanding the Father as the God of Israel. In his description of the Son this leads to understanding the Son of Mary as the eternal Son and the second identity of the triune God; this Jesus constitutes two natures as one person. In and through these descriptions Jenson avoids describing any concrete entity that is merely the Logos or the man. He also tries to avoid describing the *hypostasis* as a synthesis of the two things. Starting with Jesus he is unwilling to define either nature in any way that excludes this person. This one cannot be known as God separate from his creatureliness or as a creature independent of his eternal sonship.

This directness of confession develops the neo-Chalcedonian tradition, but also depends on the Lutheran tradition, from which Jenson hails. As such, it is helpful to look at a critique of this tradition to understand how Jenson is similar to and different from his denominational forefathers. To do this it is clarifying to look at Karl Barth’s doctrine of reconciliation. This is the case because Barth critiques the Lutheran concern for the ‘communication of the natures’ and the tendency to separate this from the *unio hypostica* by a drastic focus on Jesus Christ. By comparing and contrasting Jenson with Barth it is possible to see the way in which Jenson’s direct identification of the Son and the divine nature help him move beyond the limitations

⁸⁰ To the immediately following see *ST I*, 82-6.

⁸¹ *ST I*, 85.

of Lutheran scholasticism. This move is possible because Jenson's hyper-Cyrrillian Christology begins with and continues on with the person of Jesus.

VII. Karl Barth, Jenson, and the Person of the Son

George Hunsinger has convincingly argued that Karl Barth's Christology and his magisterial *Church Dogmatics* are shaped by the basic logic of Chalcedon.⁸²

Hunsinger explains that Barth's Christology develops as he 'alternates back and forth, deliberately, between an 'Alexandrian' and an 'Antiochene idiom.' As he does so he tries 'to follow the lead of the New Testament itself by employing a definite diversity of idioms' to avoid a one sided emphases on either the humanity or divinity of Jesus Christ.⁸³ The point of this, according to Hunsinger, is 'to comprehend the incomprehensibility of the Incarnation precisely in its incomprehensibility.'

Continuing, he quotes Barth to indicate the appropriate dialectical methodology that respects the inherent mystery of this event: "It is impossible to listen at one and the same time to the two statements that Jesus of Nazareth is the son of God and that the Son of God is Jesus of Nazareth. One hears either the one or the other or one hears nothing. When one is heard, the other can be heard only indirectly, in faith."⁸⁴ Here the subject is Jesus Christ who is God and Man. He is one and both and somehow both at once. In response to this subject Barth looks at the three aspects of this one person trying to avoid separation and confusion. To appreciate this we will look at Barth's starting point and two aspects of his description of Jesus Christ. The point of

⁸² George Hunsinger, *Disruptive Grace: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 133-4. Hereafter abbreviated *Disruptive Grace*, and page number. See as well 'Double Agency as a Test Case' in *How to Read Karl Barth: the Shape of His Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 185-224.

⁸³ *Disruptive Grace*, 135.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.* At this point Barth's christo-logic corresponds to his Trinitarian logic. In neither place is Barth able or willing to seek a synthesis of two things that seem to be essentially related and opposed. For the definitive expression of this in the Trinitarian aspect see *Church Dogmatics* I/1, 423-4. There Barth explains that 'in the doctrine of the Trinity our concern is with God's oneness in threeness and threeness in oneness. Past these two obviously one-sided and unsatisfactory formulas we cannot get...The concept "three-in-oneness" must be regarded as the conflation of both these formulae...which we cannot attain to...the advantage of this concept can never be more than the dialectical union and distinction in the mutual relation between these two, in themselves, one-sided and unsatisfactory formulae.'

this is to contrast Barth's basic logic with Jenson, to note Barth's critiques of the Lutheran tradition, and note the way Jenson's description of Jesus answers these critiques.

VII.1 Barth and the Christological Beginning

In volume four of the *Church Dogmatics* Barth develops his Christology by relentlessly and repetitively interpreting God's act of reconciliation in Christ. For Barth, the content and origin of the message, which is received by and proclaimed by the church, is this free and faithful act of God to be with and for us.⁸⁵ That this one event is God's act, which includes us, is captured in the promise of God: 'I will be your God; you will be my people.'⁸⁶ This free and gracious act of the triune God, according to Barth, begins in God's eternal election and leads to our thankfulness. As such this act reveals the origin and goal of God's will and way with and in creation.⁸⁷ To explore and explain this mystery of our salvation Barth describes Jesus Christ as the Lord who is a servant, the servant who is Lord, and at one and the same time the true witness. In this three-fold pattern Barth develops the argument that this one person is truly God, truly man, and the mediating God-man.

At the beginning of this Barth unambiguously asserts that the one who bears the name of Jesus Christ must determine all our concepts and ideas as we use them in this effort.⁸⁸ Jesus Christ plays this central logical role because he is the content and form of the one Word of God.⁸⁹ As a result, this one in the unity of his person and work must be the starting point and criteria of all our words about God. This one person in his life and work makes known 'the honour and glory and eternity and omnipotence and freedom, the being as Creator and Lord, of the Father, Son, and Spirit.'⁹⁰ Our words about God must therefore respond to his self-revelation. This can happen because 'he is God as He takes part in the event which constitutes the divine being.'⁹¹ Because God acts with God to make God known our speech about

⁸⁵ CD, IV/1, 3.

⁸⁶ CD, IV/1, 38.

⁸⁷ CD IV/1, 8.

⁸⁸ CD IV/1, 16.

⁸⁹ CD IV/1, 53.

⁹⁰ CD IV/1, 129

⁹¹ CD IV/1, 129

God is a response to this person that can and must be controlled by his personal actuality.

To apply this and describe Jesus Christ as truly God Barth takes up the idiom of Alexandria. This happens as Barth stresses that Jesus Christ is the one Son. This one is truly God in his gracious and condescending action and history. Throughout this Barth argues that this one is God even and especially in his lowliness. Herein the decisive thought is that 'God shows Himself to be great and true God in the fact that He can and will let His grace bear this cost, that He is capable and willing and ready for this condescension.'⁹² As the Son is God he can and does go into the far country to live as the faithful man who is nonetheless God. In just this way Jesus Christ reveals the divine nature as he is truly God in all his suffering and submission to the Father. Because Barth begins with Jesus Christ, he avoids the Alexandrian tendency to obscure the reality of the Son's human nature. This one and the same is God as the one who suffers the weakness and impotence, the shame, perishing, the guilt and nothingness of human existence as God.⁹³ At this point, the concern is not with an impassible *Logos asarkos* that assumes the human nature. Instead, the focus is on Jesus Christ, the one who is the Word of God and who as such reveals the Father. This is the case because there is one *hypostasis* who exists in two natures. He is the lowly and obedient Son who acts as a servant; and yet, this active one is God and is God acting in the world. As such, Jesus Christ is the Son who relates to the Father in perfect obedience and humility as God.⁹⁴

To describe Jesus Christ as truly Man, Barth alternates to the opposite Chalcedonian tradition or trajectory. Here, the task is to look at the same event and action of God but to see it in a different aspect. He explains that this one divine act 'has to be seen and understood in relation to the man to whom it applies and on whose behalf, for whom and to whom and with whom, it took place.'⁹⁵ Having spoken of Jesus Christ as the true God, Barth's task in this second aspect is to speak in the most radical ways about how man is exalted to be with God. This happens, for Barth, in and through the movement from above to below in Christ. Avoiding any divinization of humanity, Barth understands this as a coming to God made possible by the one

⁹² CD IV/1, 159

⁹³ CD IV/1, 176

⁹⁴ CD IV/1, 207-210.

⁹⁵ CD IV/2, 5

person of Jesus Christ. For Barth, only Christology can guard against the temptation to divinize the human nature as we think of reconciled man.⁹⁶ This essential point of departure ‘has its roots *in the identity* of the Son of God *with* the Son of Man, Jesus of Nazareth, in what this man was and did as such...In and with his humiliation (as the Son of God) there took place also his exaltation (as the Son of Man). This exaltation is the type and dynamic basis for what will take place and is to be known as the exaltation of man in his reconciliation with God.’⁹⁷ In this complementary description Barth takes up the strength of the Antiochene tradition to stress the distinction of the two natures united in one person. As Barth does this, he consciously and consistently tries to avoid the tendency to separate the Son from Jesus.

This second aspect is made more clear in Barth’s reflections on John 1:14. In this Barth describes the Incarnation of the Son of God as a going out, and the exaltation as the coming home of the Son of Man. He describes this event as a single action ‘in which each of the *two elements* is related to the other and can be known and understood only in this relationship: the going out of God only as it aims at the coming in of man; the coming in of man only as the reach and outworking of the going out of God; and the whole in its original and proper form only as the being and history of the one Jesus Christ.’⁹⁸ To secure this union and to explain the identity of the Son with Jesus, Barth tries to spell out the nature of Christ’s pre-existence. He does this by explaining the nature of God’s pre-temporal decision to be God with man. Within this the focus, for Barth, is on the hypostatic union in which and by which the Son of God decides to be one with the Son of Man. Barth explains that ‘in the divine election of grace we have to do with the Son of Man elected by the eternal Son of God and therefore with the election of the one, whole Jesus Christ. And in it, as the election of the Son of man, we have to do with His election to a fellowship with God corresponding to God’s fellowship with Him.’⁹⁹ As this decision is real for God the Son of God is eternally united with this other in a relation of distinction. This given, it might appear as if the Incarnation happens so that the man Jesus Christ can be with the Father; he is the man to whom this decision applies and the one on whose

⁹⁶ CD IV/2, 19

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ CD IV/2, 21; emphasis added.

⁹⁹ CD IV/2, 32

behalf it takes place. This is the case because it seems as if the Son of God acts for and to and with the Son of Man for whom this event takes place.

Despite the strength with which Barth asserts that there is only one person and one subject of the Incarnation,¹⁰⁰ there remains in this aspect of his Christology a tendency to speak of two elements or things that are united in one person's history. Even as Barth thinks of the divine nature as that which is jointly possessed by the Father, Son, and Spirit, there is a propensity to look away from Jesus to the eternal communion of God. This happens when Barth speaks of the eternal decision of the Son, the assumption of the human nature by the Son, and the way in which the Son receives the human essence to be with him in eternity. In each of these critical places Barth seeks to maintain a distinction between the two natures and guard the freedom of God. He does this by emphasizing the action of the Son who is other than Jesus. Whereas Barth begins his Christology with a clarion call to focus on Jesus Christ, here the focus is on the union of two things in one *hypostasis*. In this it is clear that one of those things is the active agent of the Son that is other than Jesus. This is, according to Barth, the secret of the existence of Jesus Christ that is both in and beyond this human person.¹⁰¹

Barth's explicit discussion of the two nature's doctrine makes this clear. At this point Barth suggests that there is a real union, but no unity between the two natures. This is the case because there remain two things, which participate fully in each other, but do not combine to make God into man, man into God, or make a third thing.¹⁰² Barth justifies this distinction and the focus on the hypostatic union through his critique of the Lutheran tradition and their focus on the communication of attributes.¹⁰³ Barth's insistence is again and again that we focus on the subject of the Incarnation.¹⁰⁴ The point is not to reflect on the possibilities that the Incarnation makes actual, but to speak analytically of the single subject. This first leads Barth to critique the Lutheran notion of personal predicates where what is proper to and only to the Word is said of the humanity of Jesus and visa versa. The problem, according

¹⁰⁰ Barth, *CD IV/2*, 50, can even say that 'there is only the one God, the Son, and no one and nothing either alongside or even in Him.'

¹⁰¹ *CD IV/2*, 44.

¹⁰² *CD IV/2*, 62-3.

¹⁰³ *CD IV/2*, 66; see as well 59 ff.; 73ff.

¹⁰⁴ Made most forcefully and appropriately, before discussing the communication of attributes, at *CD IV/2*, 70.

to Barth, is that these statements were taken as true, even though they did not correspond to the nature of the subject.

This tendency towards reflecting on the relation of two natures in abstraction from the reality of the person is closely related to Barth's next critique: that the Lutherans failed to begin and remain with the person in the development of the *communicatio idiomata- genus majesticum*. As a result, there is a swapping of predicates between abstract natures that inevitably leads to separation and confusion of these natures. In other words, when the Lutheran scholastics began to think through the way that the two natures are mutually indwelling they failed to maintain a proper focus on the hypostatic union and the priority of the divine in this union. As a result they conceived of the two natures in abstraction from the person and then spoke of the two as mutually determining. The effect, according to Barth, is that we can and must worship his humanity as we worship his divinity.¹⁰⁵ This in turn leads to the possibility that a human nature, in this case the human nature of Jesus Christ, can be made divine. Once this abstract possibility is noted, it then becomes impossible to limit this possibility to Jesus Christ. As a result, the attempt to speak faithfully about Jesus Christ as God is carried out in such a way that the truth of his person becomes a general truth that is possibly true of all persons.¹⁰⁶

In contrast, Barth attempts to respond to the address of God to man that is made to the human nature in Jesus Christ. Through this Barth suggests that christological thought must focus on the subject of the Incarnation. In turn this can and must lead to the recognition of God's freedom to be lowly in his majesty and to be humbled in his obedience.¹⁰⁷ In the address of God, the human nature is determined for participation in the divine. Additionally, and crucially, the divine is really and truly and freely determined for participation in the human through the gracious decision of God to be God with man. All of this, for Barth, takes place in and to Jesus Christ as Man through the grace and goodness of God. As a result, it remains possible and necessary to know and distinguish two distinct natures united in

¹⁰⁵ CD IV/2, 77.

¹⁰⁶ Barth's conclusion, CD IV/2, 81-2, captures the problem and expresses it with characteristic scorn; he explains that this Christology and methodology 'leads smoothly and directly to anthropology: ...to a 'high-pitched' anthropology; to the doctrine of a humanity which is not only capable of deification, but already deified, or at any rate is on the point of apotheosis or deification.'

¹⁰⁷ CD IV/2, 84-5.

Him. This capacity to distinguish between the two natures is affirmed by Barth in his final discussion of the *communicatio operationum*. Again, Barth sides with the Reformed to say that the active agent of the Incarnation is the person Jesus and not the two united natures, which work in conjunction. However, at this point Barth critiques both traditions for remaining in static categories that obscure the nature of the Incarnation as history or event.¹⁰⁸ This is summarized by Barth's suggestion that this logic of actuality and eventfulness follows from the one subject that is known in the Incarnation-Jesus Christ.¹⁰⁹

Barth is certainly right to assert that the active subjectivity of the Son is the starting point for our reflection on Christ's person. Moreover, he is right that the task of thinking of the two natures of this Son must begin with the person of Jesus and avoid abstractions, generalizations, and false unions. However, his focus on the hypostatic union seems to limit the extent to which Barth is faithful to his initial and determining command. Instead of focusing on the person of Jesus, he looks beyond and through this person to the union of two things or to the two elements known in Christ. This can be seen in the way Barth forms the question that sets his task: How is the Son of Man exalted to the side of God?¹¹⁰ Here the God in view is not the Father, but is instead the Son of God. Taken bluntly, this appears to suggest that there are two sons united in perfect relation. This tendency can also be seen in the way that Barth thinks of the unity and distinction of the natures as something discernible *in* Jesus. Here, the focus is on two things in Christ that can be known in distinction from each other.¹¹¹ Is this the only way to distinguish between divinity and humanity starting with Christ? Is there another way that can respond to his critiques and move beyond this equally problematic notion?

VII.2 Jenson and the Christological Continuation

With this last point we come to the key difference between Barth and Jenson. For Barth and Jenson the Son is the man Jesus. To see and know this person in his actuality is to know God the Son. But for Jenson the Son of Man is not hypostatically

¹⁰⁸ CD IV/2, 105.

¹⁰⁹ CD IV/2, 106-8.

¹¹⁰ CD IV/2, 48.

¹¹¹ Barth's repetition of Leo's famous logic makes this clear; see CD IV/2 104-105.

related to the Son of God, nor is there a human nature that is graciously related to the one person of the Son. Instead, the man Jesus simply is the Son. Jesus is this one as he is related to the Father as God, not to the divine nature of the Son. This does not imply a simple existence in autonomous actuality of a person who might not have been the Son. Instead, Jesus exists in the totality of his personal actuality because of God's initial election and his continual election to sustain and raise this one in the Spirit. In the actuality and perfect mutuality of this double relation the one person Jesus is God with God. The Son of Man is God as the Son of God who is directly related to the Father and the Spirit. Likewise, this one and the same is related in grace to the community with whom he lived and for whom he died. Therefore, for Jenson, focusing on Jesus means looking at this one person in his relations to these other persons without whom he is neither the Son of God nor the Son of Man.

This christocentric ontology applies Jenson's neo-Nicene logic in which the persons are ontologically basic. This shift implies that the Christological question is approached in a radically different manner. For example, if Jesus is the Lord and meets the church in absolute sovereignty, then he is a perfect person beyond whom there is no transcending and through whom there is no perception. In other words, we cannot and should not try to see beyond or through Jesus a secret of his existence with another Son. Instead, we are encountered by the Word and are called to describe this person's actuality with us and his relation to the Father in the Spirit. In turn when we know that this person is born of Mary, grows in wisdom, stature, and favor with God and man or hungers and thirsts, then we know he is human. Likewise, when he makes the Father known as the only-begotten Son, quiets the storm, or gives the Spirit, then we know that this person is God with God. If this trinitarian and personal logic is accepted, then Jenson's construction does two things:

1. appropriates and resituates Barth's basic axiom: to begin with the person and history of Jesus and fill out all our concepts in light of his person:
2. moves beyond the Lutheran tendencies that Barth critiques.

To make this clear it is essential to note two points. First, Jenson explicitly accepts Barth's suggestion that discussion of the two natures is analytical reflection on the one person of the Son. As was noted above, Jenson's 'simple reminder' clarifies that person of Christ is the starting point and end of our reflection on the natures; he is the one and same person to whom all true statements refer in a direct and simple way. Second, Jenson's discussion of the two natures doctrine attempts to

avoid all description of generally defined natures whose properties are communicable. Likewise, his discussion avoids the notion that the human nature is made divine as Christ participates in and determines the divine nature. This is the case because the *hypostasis*, and not the nature, of Jesus participates in and constitutes the two natures. Because the persons are metaphysically primary and so constitute natures in relation, Christ is human and divine as one person in two sets of relation. He distinguishes the two natures as a person in two natures, but cannot be known in himself or by himself in any way that distinguishes without separation the two natures. The persons and the mutuality of God cannot be transcended or abstracted from without creating a speculative principle that inevitably confuses the relation between the triune God and humanity.

In what sense then is the human nature adopted and exalted in Christ? Primarily, we have communion with God through this person and his particular personal reality as God and man. Within this event our hypostatic actuality is not changed insofar as we are viewed by and in ourselves. In this sense, Barth is right that God became man so that we might come to God without becoming God.¹¹² On the one hand it is clear that the man Jesus, the human and divine person, is God with the Father and Spirit; on the other, it is clear that his participation in the divine nature does not make other humans divine. His actuality as God is determined by his relationship to the Father and the Spirit in such a way that he actualizes the divine nature with these two and the human nature with his brothers and sisters. His distinctive actuality as the Son in relation exalts the human community with, in and under him into relation to the Father through the Spirit. He alone has this unique status as the Son of God and the Son of Man who lives two histories and keeps them distinct. He alone is the high priest who mediates between God and man as the God-man. In sum, his two natures are not conceivable as two states or things. Nor is it possible to divide his action and appropriate certain acts to distinct and separately known natures. We know one person Jesus Christ. Moreover, we know that he constitutes two natures as one person; the divine nature with the Father and Spirit and the human nature in relation to his mother, brothers and sisters.

¹¹² CD IV/2, 106.

VIII. The Person and Work of Jesus the Son

To elucidate the unity of the person and work of Jesus in Jenson's Christology, I will begin with George Hunsinger's critique of Jenson. According to Hunsinger, Jenson has a neo-Arian view of Christ that corresponds to his Hegelian doctrine of the Trinity and Socinian view of the Crucifixion. Hunsinger is certainly right that 'in any coherent soteriological scheme (and Jenson meets the test of coherence), Christ's person and work are mutually implicated. The person is suitable for a certain sort of work, even as the work, in turn, requires a certain sort of person.'¹¹³ Whether he is right that 'in Jenson's case, an "Arian" (or better, "neo-Arian") view of Christ's person coheres with a "Socinian" (or "neo-Socinian") view of his saving significance,'¹¹⁴ depends on the way in which Jenson relates the life, death and resurrection of Jesus to his person. If the life and death are for Jenson 'only the resurrection's necessary precondition(s),' as Hunsinger suggests,¹¹⁵ then the work of Jesus might in fact become insignificant for his resurrected person. If Christ's historic and eschatological life are not connected by a continuity of real agency of the person of Jesus then there is a problem. If either or both of these things are actually the case then Hunsinger's critique, that Jenson's Jesus is merely a passive, impotent, and created redeemer, might be right.

Essentially, Jesus' life must have a significance that the Resurrection confirms, even if it in some sense determines this same significance. More pointedly, Jesus cannot be raised to be something other than he was in and through his life. If he is in God's eternity the savior of creation and the Lord of life, then in his life this actuality must determine his identity as the Son of God. He must be in created time what he is in God's infinite life or his exaltation could be seen as an adoption and his inclusion in the divine life a confusion of the divine *ousia*

In the conclusion to 'The Christological Problem' Jenson affirms without qualification 'that the one person, God the Son who is Jesus, suffered.'¹¹⁶ He continues and explains that 'with this proposition at last in place ...we are free to

¹¹³ George Hunsinger, 'Robert Jenson's Systematic Theology: a review essay' *Scottish Journal of Theology* vol. 55 no. 2 (2002), 174

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ *ST I*, 144

say...God the Son suffers all the contingencies and evils recorded in the Gospels, and concludes them by suffering execution.’¹¹⁷ This one and the same *hypostasis*, that is simply Jesus, is God and man, the God-man who ‘bears among us the power of God.’¹¹⁸ He is the one who in fallen creation and among rebellious creatures “receives in himself the fullness of perfect and full deity,” so that his creaturely actuality, his “flesh,” is itself “the infinite fountain of holiness.”¹¹⁹ This one, according to Jenson, is God as a man so that his human action and presence is without doubt or indirection the action and presence of God, with whatever that might do for us and our salvation and our corresponding conceptions of his person and work. There is one human person who lives and works as God, or more specifically as one of the Trinity. In this context it is painfully clear that Jenson’s Jesus is one with the Father through the Spirit in the life the gospels narrate; in other words, he is in created time what he is in God’s time.

Jenson realizes that this rhetoric and the identification of Jesus as God have a certain unreality within the terms set for the tradition by the Antiochenes. Despite this he concludes that ‘it is clear that there truly is only one individual person who is the Christ, who lives as one of the Trinity and one of us, and that he is personal precisely as one of us, ...he as creature is our savior...he plays his role in the triune life and does not need to abstract from his human actuality to do so.’¹²⁰ This one *hypostasis* or person plays his role or does his work both as a creature and as the savior. This given, it seems that Jenson avoids any neo-Arian position; Christ is in his life and in his person what he is in God’s eternity. In both he is one with the Father in the Spirit as God and man. In both he is one with us in the perfect graciousness of his decision to be our Lord. As a result of this decision and his life that embodies this decision, the Resurrection both confirms and determines Christ’s life, work and person as the life and work of God.¹²¹

To more fully understand Christ’s role in the divine drama and the way his person is inseparable from his work we must turn to Jenson’s discussion of ‘the

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid, quoting Gregory of Palamas from *Homilies*, XVI, PG LCI:193b.

¹²⁰ ST I, 144-5

¹²¹ Jenson’s description of this is not without its unhappy inconsistencies. We will return to this in the conclusion where we will critique Jenson’s description of the Son’s pre-existence and the way his inadequate description causes Hunsinger’s confusion.

gospel's primal claim: that *Jesus is risen from the dead.*¹²² In this it is critical to note how Jenson describes the suffering servant as the present and powerful Lord. This one and the same, throughout his life and in his death and in his resurrection, anticipates and actualizes the Kingdom of God. Moreover, he does so, according to Jenson, as one person of the triune God. To highlight the unity of this history and the Son's personal agency I will first look at Jenson's description of the person of the Word and then at the related discussion of the crucifixion.

VIII.1 The Life of Jesus: an Essential Word?

Chapter ten of Jenson's *Systematic Theology* tries to answer a basic question: how can Jesus, a figure of the past, continue to be the Word, or have contemporary significance within the church and the world? In this discussion Jenson begins to clarify how this person is fit for his salvific work. Ultimately and decisively for Jenson, Jesus is the Word spoken by the Father as the one who is resurrected from the dead. Because of this the church knows that Jesus Christ is the content of the Father's love. He is the decisive end of all of God's ways. Without being raised to new life Jesus could not be active as God's Word and so able to identify himself to the church and the world as the Son. On one level this is common sense. If Jesus is not raised to the right hand of the Father, then the only available Jesus would be the Christ of Faith or the Jesus of history. In this situation Christ's significance would only be known through his effects on others. Jenson makes this common sense point in a discussion of the historical Jesus and the confusion and insight of Bultmann and his school.

What is uncommon in this discussion is the sense that Jenson gives to the historical life of Jesus. Within this life Jenson includes the Resurrection and the continuing action of Jesus to identify himself after his resurrection. As such, the narrative that identifies Jesus essentially includes birth, death and resurrected life. The basic difference here between Bultmann's existentialism and Jenson's notion of the person is the relation of time and eternity. According to Jenson, deity is not above and beyond the historical. Nor is God the Son divided from time by the eschatological reality of the Word. In fact, Jesus is raised and continues to be active in creation and these acts are narrated in the gospels as identifications of the one life

¹²² *ST I*, 165.

of the Son. So both as the historical Word of the resurrected Son and as the eschatological Word of the Jesus of history, the content of the Father's speech is one life that opens the same future. This Son is the Word of the Father spoken when Quirinius was governor of Syria and when the Spirit gathers the church. In neither situation is Jesus a passive word. Instead, his life of faithful obedience as narrated in the gospels is his response to the Father's action. Moreover, he speaks in his church. Both this initial and continuing speech, according to Jenson, are what the Father speaks and the Spirit makes actual and potent. In other words, Jesus is the Word as he lives with the Father in the Spirit and so is eternally active to identify himself; he is the word spoken that speaks. As the active and powerful Word of God this one and the same only exists as he is from the Father in the Spirit. Accordingly, he is active to be and do what only God can do, open up our future to God. Here the Cappadocian rule of mutual action is exemplified by Jenson's description of the Son as the Word; the Son neither acts or speaks or exists without the relations that constitute his being and the being of God.

This continuity of agency granted, it is critical to clarify that this Word has as its content the 'historical' life determined by its end in the crucifixion. There must be a continuity of agency in the life of the one person that unifies his work and word. According to Jenson's general sketch of Jesus' identity, the risen one was an itinerant prophet who, like all of Israel's prophets, called Israel to faithfulness. The content of his message was 'the immediate advent of the Kingdom.' In a particular way, Jesus was unlike other prophets in that he 'knew himself as the last and unconditional messenger of the Kingdom, so that his fellows response to his mission was in fact their response to the Kingdom and to God.'¹²³ In all his radical obedience he foreclosed all other conditions of eschatological decisiveness and present obedience. As a result, 'he enacted God's future for (publicans and sinners) as their present with him.' He came calling people to repentance and 'performed his wonders as signs, acted-out parables, of the Kingdom's immediacy,' which according to Jenson were in actuality '*instances of the immediacy of the Kingdom.*'¹²⁴

For Jenson, this way of interpreting others by the promise of the coming Kingdom indicates how Jesus interpreted his own life. According to Jenson, Jesus understood that he would 'triumph or fail as the friend of publicans and sinners, as the

¹²³ ST I, 176.

¹²⁴ ST I, 177.

Shepard who went out to seek the stray, leaving the ninety and nine.’¹²⁵ As the one who announced the kingdom and identified the actuality of this kingdom with his presence, Jesus interpreted himself as the promise and as one dependent on the promise of God’s future faithfulness. Therefore, ‘in his consciousness, of *being* the immanence of the Kingdom’s coming, he did and said what could only be done and said by God’s immediate authority: he forgave sin and perfected the law.’¹²⁶ As this one who brings in the Kingdom he called God Father and presented himself as the Son. This one came as a word commanded by the Father and lived in obedience as the Son. In this he opened a future to others as life with himself in the Kingdom of God.

According to Jenson’s reading of the Gospel’s, the priest and teachers of the law understood the issue posed by Jesus’ self-presentation. They understood his claim of essential relation to God. They understood his description of the Kingdom, the way of obedience to God, and his identification of God and God’s way with Israel and creation. In turn they understood that in and through this Jesus asserted that God was identified by and with his existence. This is revealed, according to Jenson, in their ‘percipient charge’ that this blasphemer pretended to be the ‘King of the Jews.’ That he was judged to be the King of the Jews by the Father is the irony of the Gospel. It is also the confirmation that this one is the Word in and throughout his life, from birth to his high priestly ministry. In sum, Jesus is the Word spoken by Father who speaks in every aspect of his life with the Father in the power of the Spirit. At each point of discussing this Jenson avoids any suggestion that Jesus is merely passive, impotent or merely a created redeemer. He is a creature, is obedient to the Father, and is empowered by the Spirit, but is so as the Son of God and Son of Man. More pointedly, he is the one person whose will and being is necessarily actual with the Father and the Spirit. He is a person, both divine and human, whose existence is inseparable from his work with the Father and the Spirit and his work with and for us.

VIII.2 The Conclusion of this Life

Having consistently asserted that the life of Jesus is an eternal life without end, Jenson admits that ‘there is, of course, a plain sense in which Jesus’ life does end with his

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

death.’¹²⁷ The cross is and must be central to any Christian theology. However, for Jenson, it is so only as it makes one concept with the Resurrection. This penultimate ending is overcome in the Resurrection, but is nevertheless a real ending by and with which the identity of the Son is sealed. In Jenson’s lingo, his death makes it clear that the promise of his life is made irrevocable in his death. In vivid language Jenson describes this decisive and appropriate end: ‘until he died as he did, the Man for Others...might yet have proved a monster of ambition...That the Man for Others died rather than seek his own kingdom settles that he *is* the Man for Others and so determines the salvific import of the message that he lives as Lord.’¹²⁸ Christ really and truly died on the cross and in this ending the nature of his personhood was settled; the one that lives now with the Father in the Spirit is this one and the same who lived and died for others.

In this brief quote Jenson displays what he considers to be the logic of atonement and its necessary components. The logic of atonement is that the Son gives himself in his death as he gave himself in his life. In response, the Father accepts this Man for others in the Resurrection, and as he does so accepts the others with this one. To explicate this logic Jenson describes the event of crucifixion in connection with the Resurrection, and so narrates the message of salvation as a unified whole. In and through this the action of God must be understood as the action of the Father, Son, and Spirit that determines who God is and that God is. According to Jenson, ‘the gospel does not tell of work done by a God antecedently and otherwise determined, but itself determines who and what God is.’¹²⁹ That the Son has this determinative end and is accepted by the Father reveals, confirms, and determines God’s character as the gracious one who seeks the outcast and forsaken and accepts the cost of doing so. This love for his enemies has a certain end for Christ. That this is overcome by the Resurrection determines that this God exists as the triumphant God of all life. Who God is and that God is is made known in the essential unity and distinction between the cross and resurrection. Jenson’s language about overcoming is appropriate to this and in no way obliterates the significance of the cross; the crucified Jesus is the one and only Son who with the Father and the Spirit lives and reigns after having been crucified, having died and being buried.

¹²⁷ *ST I*, 179.

¹²⁸ *ST I*, 181.

¹²⁹ *ST I*, 165.

Jenson offers a liturgical and theoretical explanation of the atonement made in and through Christ's death and resurrection. The liturgical account is in some sense sufficient for Jenson because 'the Gospel's passion narrative is the authentic and entire account of God's reconciling action and our reconciliation, as events in his life and ours.'¹³⁰ Despite this sufficiency Jenson offers a secondary reflection of the significance of the cross for Jesus' person. This is possible for Jenson because he understands 'the events in Jerusalem and Golgotha are themselves inner triune events (that) put forward a claim to know God.'¹³¹ The God identified by and with these events is the Son who suffers the anguish of crucifixion for others, the Father who accepts the Son, and the Spirit of their unity in the event of suffering and the event of triumph. Three things become clear in Jenson's discussion:

1. Jesus is himself with and only with his sinful brothers and sisters for whom he asks forgiveness at the point where his identity is determined in love;
2. Jesus is the high priest who offers himself as God to God in his life and in his death. Because of this he makes peace between God and man as the man who is God;
3. Jesus as God and man defeated evil in and through his resistance to abuse and the misuse of power. As such, the Father's power is made perfect in the weakness of this man who is the redeeming God as a creature and as the creator.

Where does this leave us? Most basically, it leaves us with the obvious conclusion that the life and work of Jesus of Nazareth is critical for Jenson. So much so that his life, his death and his resurrection are described as inner triune events. This life from birth to death is not obscured or obliterated by Jesus' resurrection. Instead, this person is described as God with God because he really died and was really raised to the right hand of the Father. These events are inseparable from who he is as a person. Moreover, this person constitutes the divine nature with the Father and Son; Jesus Christ is *homoousios* with the Father.

Jenson's claim that Jesus, his Father, and their Spirit are God is direct and dramatic. His claim that their perfect unity constitutes the divine nature simply and directly clarifies that this is the final word about God. In his discussion of Jesus' two natures and in the discussion of his work the actuality of this person is described in a

¹³⁰ ST I, 189.

¹³¹ ST I, 191.

way that redirects christological and trinitarian reflection. The boldness of this defines Jenson's contribution to the conversation that is the church's ongoing discussion about the gospel and the gospel's God. This boldness is a function of the directness with which Jenson appropriates the oddity of the gospel's witness to the Son. There is no other Son that is known in and through this story or in and through this person. Instead, this person encounters us in the gospel narrative and in the church's proclamation as the Lord around whom there is no transcending; Jesus Christ is the Lord.

Chapter 4

Describing the Spirit of God, Christ and the Church

I. An Ecstatic and Dependant Identity of God

To this point I have argued that Jenson's identification of the triune God begins with the event of the crucified Son's Resurrection. From this event Jenson moves forward in light of critical insights from the Old Testament and the Nicene tradition. Noting this starting point and characteristic movement, I have summarized Jenson's description of the Father and the Son to highlight the temporal actuality and distinctiveness of each person. In and through this I have tried to make clear that Jenson is reorienting the basic concepts of being, eternity, and the triune community. He does so by focusing on the concrete relations between the three identities of God revealed in the biblical narrative. Using these basic descriptions of the persons of God, Jenson appropriates and radically interprets the Nicene confessions. Working in dependence on and in tension with the tradition, his task is to reorient trinitarian reflection towards the actual persons of God who encounter Israel and the church and are described in the canonical witness. The goal of this is indicated by his understanding of this tradition's founding logic: 'the original point of trinitarian dialectics is to make the relations between the identities – for example, that the Father's knowledge of himself is what he sees in Jesus – and therewith the temporal structures of evangelical history, constitutive in God.'¹

In the last chapter I suggested that the point of greatest clarity and contentiousness in Jenson's description of the triune God is his Christology. This was made clear by noting Jenson's focus on the hypostatic particularity of the one person Jesus who constitutes the divine and human natures as an ontologically basic person. To identify this Son as God it was necessary to describe his relation to the Father in the Spirit without abstracting from the temporal structures of this person's history. Jesus is known as the Son in relation to and distinction from the Father when it is clear where he comes from *and* where he is going.² Accurate description of the Son presses forward to description of the Spirit, just as it includes description of the

¹ Robert Jenson, *The Triune Identity: God According to the Gospel* (Eugene OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2002), 119.

² John 13:3.

Father. This overlap of trinitarian description is to be expected if there is a real and determinative mutuality of the persons who constitute the being of God.

Given the logic of temporal identification and the previous descriptions of the Father and Son, I will look in this chapter at Jenson's description of the Spirit of God. Jenson describes the Spirit as the identity of God who frees the Father and the Son for each other as the love and the liveliness of God's self-transcendence. This identity of God is the freedom and love of God's eschatological kingdom who gives himself to us and so causes the whole Trinity to dwell in us. In and through the development of this description, Jenson's task is two-fold and difficult: he seeks to secure the hypostatic actuality of this triune person without modifying the insight that the Spirit is the spirit of someone. The Spirit is a uniquely relative and decisively dependent person of God. Jenson describes this directly: 'to conceive the Spirit as person, we shall have to conceive a Freedom whose "I" and whose focus of consciousness are outside himself.'³ This dependant aspect of the Spirit's particular way of being is critical for Jenson as it ultimately witnesses to the nexus of relations by which and with which God brings about and perfects his life. It is only in this nexus of relations and in this particular way that the Spirit is known as another identity of God present and active with the Father and Son.

Just as he resisted specifying the identity of the Son without Jesus, Jenson resists the traditions attempt to identify the Spirit without reference to Israel or the Church. In Jenson's trinitarian propositions the one who otherwise proceeds from the Father is the Spirit of the coming Kingdom who presently gathers the church. For Jenson, the Spirit is the gift of God given to his creatures from their common future to bring about and perfect life. There is no other Spirit than the one who lives and moves and has his being in and through these relationships. That there does not appear to be a way of saying how the Spirit could be the gift of God without these relations to Christ's body is only proper. As should be expected, this logic of temporal identification by and with creation's telos leads to a distinctive and controversial set of trinitarian relations that include but surpass relations of origin.

To elucidate Jenson's driving logic and his description of the Spirit this chapter will begin with a partial ingathering of scattered references to the Spirit that appear throughout Jenson's *Systematic Theology*. This will be followed by a contrast

³ ST I, 121.

between Jenson's description of the Spirit and two traditional ways of thinking about the third person of God. This will lead to another appearance of the Cappadocians, another comparison with Barth, and will conclude with a description of the Spirit as the narrative causality of God's triune being.

II. The Spirit in Scripture

Jenson describes the Holy Spirit as the future of God, or the person of God's future who stands at the end of all God's ways.⁴ An extended quote should make this basic characterization a little more clear: 'the Spirit is the Liveliness of the divine life because he is the Power of the divine future. He is the one who, when he in time gives a "down payment" on the Kingdom, gives precisely himself. He is the Love into which all things will at the last be brought, who is thus the fulfilment not only of created life but of the divine life.'⁵ The key words in these identifying descriptions are liveliness, power, future, love and fulfilment, which Jenson suggests characterize this identity of God throughout the biblical story. The key concept, in which these descriptions coalesce, is the Kingdom of God. Within Jenson's reading of the Old and New Testaments this prophetic image is closely tied to the Spirit and the hope this identity of God inspires. As Jenson clarifies this, his identification of the Spirit follows the eschatological dynamic of the biblical narrative. To elucidate Jenson's basic description of the Spirit it is important to focus on two key words at the end of this last sentence: biblical and narrative. This chapter will begin by focusing on the first and conclude with the second. In other words, we will begin with content and move to form.

Jenson's attempt to describe the Spirit as the person of God's future is an attempt to be faithful to the biblical witness. As was suggested above, Jenson's identification of God begins with Resurrection. He interprets this event as the key moment of clarity within the biblical narrative at which the Spirit is made known as an identity of God. According to Jenson, Jesus was raised into God's unlimited future by and through the Spirit of the Father.⁶ Jenson's description of this identity that acts with the Father in and through Jesus' life is crystallized at this point in the

⁴ *ST I*, 157; *ST II*, 319.

⁵ *ST I*, 157

⁶ *ST I*, 143, 200.

eschatological determination of the Son's life.⁷ Consequently, he suggests that 'the Spirit is above all life-giving and liberating, and just so is anticipation of the End, transformation by the power of what we shall be in God.'⁸ With this in mind, Jenson reads the various references to the Spirit throughout scripture with retrospective clarity. From this starting point Jenson's characterization follows the biblical narrative and moves from creation to recreation. The point of this is to identify the Spirit who enlivens and perfects creation as its End, as the goal of the Father's will given a determinate shape by Jesus' love.

Given the Resurrection, the 'starting point' of Jenson's total description is the primal identification of the Spirit as the breath of God. According to Jenson, the '*ruach* of the Lord' is the breath of the Lord, or the whirlwind of his liveliness by which God transcends himself to create, to enliven other reality, and ultimately to make his creation free.⁹ Jenson notes two ways in this enlivening presence is described in scripture. Firstly, the Spirit is seen as the power of God given to specific leaders. According to Jenson, 'the formula for the Judges states the principle for all including Moses and the early Kings: each time history was in stasis, "the Spirit of the Lord fell upon" so-and-so, and history moved again.'¹⁰ Secondly, Jenson notes that the Spirit is seen as the power of the prophets. If prophecy is speaking God's own word to Israel, the Spirit is the power of God that enables the prophet in the task. Jenson cites an archetypal example: 'the word is upon my tongue...the Spirit of the Lord speaks through me.'¹¹ Here, Jenson's choice of David's words indicates the fuzzy boundary between the Spirit's activity in history to inspire Israel's leaders and prophets.

It is vital to Jenson's task that this fuzziness increase, or more exactly, that the distinction between the two be transcended. In Jenson's reading of the Old Testament, movement in this direction begins in the exilic prophets when Israel's

⁷ Jenson cites 2 Corinthians 1:22; 5:5; 3:6, 17-8 as examples of this description of the Spirit as the guarantee of the future. This summation comes at the end of a relatively extensive discussion of Romans 1:3-4. Wolfart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology* vol. I tr. Geoffrey Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 319, makes a similar argument citing extensively from Paul and Acts 2:24.

⁸ *ST* I, 143.

⁹ Jenson, *ST* I, 86, cites a string of texts to ground this characterization; central among these is the account of the Exodus where 'its the Lord's *ruach* that blew about the waters and the Egyptians to accomplish the Exodus (Exodus 15:8-10).'

¹⁰ *ST* I, 86.

¹¹ *ST* I, 87.

hopes become eschatological and then apocalyptic.¹² Herein, hope that God will enliven and establish Israel becomes hope that God will do something new, the nature of which will 'surpass realization within the continuities of this world.'¹³ This dynamic of promise and fulfilment and this particular end define the context in which 'the coming of the Spirit that brings the Lord's promises becomes also their content.'¹⁴ In sum, the promises of God's presence and protection leads to the hope that God's Spirit as his power and liveliness will determine all life.

According to Jenson, this synthesis was imagined in two dominant motifs: one messianic and the other communal. In the messianic vision the Spirit of God will rest on one person who will establish universal peace and justice and gather God's people; in this vision of redemption and restoration the synthesis of prophetic and kingly gifts would be complete in one person. For example, the Spirit, according to Isaiah will rest on the Lord's anointed servant so that he may redeem Israel.¹⁵ In the communal vision, as exemplified by Joel 2:28, there will be new life for Israel and creation because the Spirit will fall on all people and so cease to be an exceptional gift that exclusively empowers individual prophets or leaders.

Jenson suggests that the New Testament's description of the Spirit synthesizes these two different eschatological visions in an unexpected way. This occurred when there was a gathering of the community by the bearer of the Spirit, who as a prophet and king gives the Spirit to all people.¹⁶ Jenson describes Jesus as the prophetic bearer of the Spirit who brings in the Kingdom of God through the power of the Spirit. He notes that this one is baptized in the Spirit,¹⁷ his mission is inaugurated by the Spirit's descent,¹⁸ which is followed by rapture,¹⁹ trial,²⁰ and return in power,²¹ all of which is narrated as a call vision. This one is known as a prophet mighty in word and deed whose messianic role is determined and confirmed when he is resurrected. As Jesus

¹² For the following see *ST I*, 87-89.

¹³ *ST I*, 69.

¹⁴ *ST I*, 87.

¹⁵ *ST I*, 87, citing Isaiah 11:2-9 and 42:1.

¹⁶ *ST I*, 88.

¹⁷ Mark 1:9-11.

¹⁸ Mark 1:12-15.

¹⁹ Mark 1:12.

²⁰ Mark 1:13.

²¹ Luke 4:18-9.

is resurrected and is with God he gives the Spirit to his people as only God can do.²² In this Jesus stands beyond the community, while belonging to it; he is related to the entire community as the one who constitutes, rules, and enlivens it. According to Jenson, it is as these personal and communal relations are established that the Spirit appears in his personhood. At this point he 'shows his face.'²³

Following this dramatic development, Jenson concludes that 'as the Spirit shows his face, the church appears.'²⁴ At this point, the breath of God is personal as the identity of God that enlivens Christ and gathers his community. At this moment, which anticipates creation's perfection, the Spirit's active presence frees the community for Christ and Christ for the community. In this the Spirit unites one to the other as the agent of God's freedom and liveliness. These dynamics of relation and distinction by which the Son and the Spirit are identified lead Jenson to suggest that the doctrine of the church could appear in the first volume of his *Systematic Theology*.²⁵ Despite this possibility Jenson discusses the church as a unique work of God. The church, according to Jenson and Paul, is the body of Christ and the temple of the Spirit, which has its being in anticipation through the Spirit, the 'Eschatos.'²⁶ This eschatological identification of the Spirit complements and completes the primal identification of the Spirit as it fulfils the historic and prophetic action of the Spirit.

In and through this interpretation of the canonical witness to the person of the Spirit Jenson makes three things clear:

1. that the Spirit is the power of God's promised future as a dependent but fully actual person of God;
2. that the Spirit is the gift of God given to the Son, who in turn gives the Spirit as God;
3. that the Spirit is graciously given by Christ to the church to be the Spirit of the community that is gathered by this same person of God.

In sum, the Spirit is the gift of God who is a person in his relatedness as he is given by the Father and the Son and is somehow possessed by the church.²⁷ This nexus of

²² Acts 2:32-33.

²³ *ST I*, 88.

²⁴ *ST I*, 89. See as well John Breck, 'The Face of the Spirit,' *Pro Ecclesia* vol. 3 no 2 (1994), 165-174, for an extended development of this motif.

²⁵ *ST II*, 167.

²⁶ *ST II*, 172,

²⁷ *ST II*, 182.

relations is decidedly complex. This complexity has led to intractable problems in description of this elusive person. Having noted Jenson's basic description of the Spirit we can now turn to these problems and Jenson's attempt to use the tradition's difficulties as occasions to refine and conceptualize this description.

III. The Spirit in the Tradition

From what has been described so far it should be clear that Jenson's pneumatology is as contentious as his Christology. This is the case because Jenson rejects the axiom that God is self-contained in his eternal triune being. This assumption is consistently worked out in Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae*; the effect of this is particularly relevant to the identification of the Spirit and the description of trinitarian relations. According to Jenson, Thomas conceived of two and only two processions in God of knowing and willing. These personal movements can and must begin and terminate in God as God is the perfect and perfectly self-contained subject. Jenson summarizes this logic by suggesting that 'God knows all and wills all in knowing and willing himself.'²⁸ It follows that what is real for God is what proceeds in God between God and God. This given the Spirit is described as the substantial love that follows from God's self-knowing as an act of the will.

Jenson's thought moves in the opposite direction; he assumes that God is the self-revealing God whose self-revealing is a self-determining motion that is free in its perfectly ecstatic mutuality.²⁹ This is made clear by his description of the Spirit's hypostatic actuality that is determined in relation to the Father, Son, Israel, and the church. The Spirit is the Spirit of God given to Jesus and to the Son's body to unify it to its head. The eternal actuality of the Spirit is determined by these relationships and their perfection in the eschaton, not in abstraction from this future or these relations. As such, this future is actual for God and creation as one aspect of eternity that is distinct, but not separate, from perfect pre-existence and the mediation of the present. As a result of this contrary assumption, Jenson has room in his doctrine of God for a person of God whose subsisting relation is existence as a giving gift. The Spirit is

²⁸ ST I, 124; citing *Summa Theologiae*, 1.27; 28.2.

²⁹ Obviously, Jenson does not assume that 'what is done by nature is done by necessity.' Instead, he suggest that what is done by nature is done by choice and so is done freely as it is accomplished in the eternal action of God's triune choice.

given to the Son and to the Son's people. Although Jenson's thought is ultimately in tension with much of the tradition he uses the tradition in subtle ways to develop this description of the Spirit.

III.1 Western Questions and Problems with the Spirit

Jenson begins 'The Pneumatological Problem' with the assertion that 'the discovery or creation of problems about the Spirit has been a specialty of the Western Church.'³⁰ Jenson notes that Augustine discovered two problems that have focused this traditions reflection and created its difficulties. First, spirit is what God is and all three persons are God and so are spirit, how then can one person be called the Spirit?³¹ Jenson recognizes that Augustine discovers a problem posed by scripture. He explains that in the gospel of John the Spirit is clearly described as a distinct person in relation to the Father and the Son; in the same gospel God is nearly defined as spirit.³² How then is there one person within this spiritual being who is the Spirit?

Jenson recognizes the weight of Augustine's discovery; he asks the question in a different way with his characteristic focus on speech: 'is invocation of the Spirit anything distinctive over against invocation simply of God?'³³ Augustine's answered that the Spirit is what the Father and Son are in common. Because of this the Spirit is hypostatically what the two are together. The Spirit is because the Father and Son are together one God who is spirit. Likewise, the Spirit is the bond of love because the Father and Son are loving. From Jenson's perspective this raises a secondary and significant question: Can we address and engage the shared substance of the Father and the Son? Can we invoke the bond of their relatedness that is love?

Secondly, Augustine noted that the names father and son identify specific relations of opposition. In contrast, there is no relation indicated by name Holy Spirit. In fact, its only when the Spirit is called the gift of God that there is a relation of opposition that identifies this person. But, as Augustine noted, this seems to suggest that the Spirit has being and existence only as he is given to creatures. Therefore Augustine asks, 'if he only proceeds when he is given, he would surely not proceed

³⁰ *ST I*, 146.

³¹ *The Trinity*, 5.12. Jenson notes that the same problem presents itself when the Spirit is called Love. If God is Love, how can one person be a hypostatic Love?

³² For example, compare John 16 with John 4:24.

³³ *ST I*, 146.

before there was anyone for him to be given to. How could he already be that divine substance, if he only is by being given...Or is the answer that the Holy Spirit always proceeds and proceeds from eternity, not from a point of time; but because he so proceeds as to be givable, he was already gift even before there was anyone to give him to?'³⁴

Although Jenson does not recognize Augustine's question as valid due to his conception of a temporal eternity, he nevertheless recognizes that Augustine's second question raises an underlying problem. Specifically, for Jenson, Augustine's discovery prompts us to ask: 'what exactly *is* the relation by which the Spirit is an identity other than the Father?'³⁵ If we assume that the persons of God are only distinguished by relations of origin in God and we cannot specify the relation by which the Spirit is distinguished from the Father or the Son, can we assume that there is a person distinguished by a relation? When we invoke the Spirit do we direct our address to one that is distinguishable from the God of Israel?

Both of these questions relate to a third question that Jenson notes: Does the Spirit give himself and so the love of the Father and the Son when he gives various gifts to various members of the body? According to Jenson, this question takes us into the mystery of personal love. He asks: 'How can the Spirit as a perfectly loving and self-giving person belong to the recipient without transforming the recipient into the other?'³⁶ How can there be a relation of unity in mutuality where one person possesses the other without the second being lost in relation?

For Jenson, if the Spirit is a personal being he only has himself to give. The gifts that he gives are many and separate, but 'in their mutual completeness they are nevertheless nothing but their giver.'³⁷ The dynamics of this giving, empowering, and loving have too often been worked out in the language of cause and effect. When this is the case the Spirit is divided from his gifts. This tendency, this question in particular, and the two previous ones underscore the problem of the Spirit in the Western tradition from Jenson's perspective. They do so as they reveal an inability to specify the particular way in which the Spirit exists with the Father and the Son and ultimately with us. This leads to a question that sums up all three previous questions:

³⁴ *The Trinity*, 5.16.

³⁵ *ST I*, 148.

³⁶ *ST I*, 149.

³⁷ *ST I*, 149.

Do we conceive of the Spirit as a person who we can address and invoke or as a force and so as an anhypostatic being?

III.2 The *Filioque*, Its Particular Truth and Problematic Development

Jenson moves to the debate about the *filioque* with this last summary question in mind. Jenson focuses on two things while discussing the *filioque*: first, the theological function of the phrase in and out of the creed; and, second, the Eastern critique in its theological specificity. By focusing on the theological meaning of the *filioque* Jenson attempts to appreciate and appropriate the Western insight that the *filioque* guards. Within this limitation he also recognizes the problems that it presents. Practically, this leads to a critique of Thomas and a critique of Thomas' critics.

Basically, Jenson suggests that the Western tradition and the doctrine of the *filioque* guards a particular and proper truth: the Spirit comes to us from the Son because of an antecedently actual mutual relation in God. In his typically curt fashion, Jenson cites but one example, John's account of Jesus breathing the Spirit on the disciples to send them as he was sent.³⁸ This positive insight noted, Jenson goes on to suggest that this relation has been improperly worked out in formal trinitarian propositions. Nevertheless, the *filioque* cannot be abandoned because it reads Christ's giving of the Spirit into God himself. In the process, it rightly connects trinitarian propositions to the relations that appear in the biblical narrative. The *filioque* makes clear that the breathing or sending of the Spirit by Christ depicts an inner relation of the Son and Spirit. This meaning and the method of grounding trinitarian propositions must be recognized as appropriate and necessary. This is the case even if the Orthodox critique is taken seriously. Ultimately, within any set of trinitarian propositions the fact that the Spirit is given by Christ and is called the Spirit of Christ must be recognized and appropriated.³⁹

According to Jenson, the problematic way in which this insight is developed is displayed in Thomas' logic of mutual spiration. As was noted above, Thomas identifies two personal processions of willing and knowing in God. These

³⁸ *ST I*, 150.

³⁹ *ST II*, 44.

processions correspond to the begetting of the Son and the breathing of the Spirit.⁴⁰ In these relations the Spirit and the Son are distinguished from the Father as different from the Father. Despite these distinctions, Thomas suggests that there is a problem: the Son and Spirit are not distinguished from each other by a relation of opposition.⁴¹ To secure that these two are in fact distinct persons, Thomas must posit a relation of opposition that is necessarily a relation of origin. He assumes that all relations are between two opposed persons and that in God these relations can only be of an eternal and originating sort.⁴² Therefore, for Thomas, it must be the case that the Son proceeds from the Spirit or that the Spirit proceeds from the Son. Otherwise, these two persons could collapse into one relation that subsists as two motions between the Father and another single person. In other words, the loving and willing of God in God could be a binitarian exchange. Jenson's summary is brief but vivid; he explains that for Thomas 'the relations...must make a triangle.'⁴³ To prevent such a collapse Thomas asserts that the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. This happens as they are together one source. As the two together constitute the divine nature in their perfectly subsisting relatedness, the Spirit proceeds from the divine nature as from one source. Practically, God's geometric needs are met by opposing the Spirit to the common nature of the Father and the Son.⁴⁴

Jenson accepts two assumptions of Thomas': first, that persons are differentiated by their relations; and, second, relations necessarily include opposition. Despite these shared assumptions, Jenson acknowledges Vladimir Lossky's critique of Thomas. According to Lossky, the conception of mutual spiration leads to various problems when the logic of the western system is developed. Principely, Lossky suggests that this logic obscures or relativizes the particularity of the person in the Trinity.⁴⁵ This happens as the procession of the Spirit is asserted to be from a common nature and not from the person of the Father. As the Father and the Son are together one source they produce by nature, not by *hypostasis*, the third person who is of the same nature. As a result, this procession becomes a manifestation of the

⁴⁰ *Summa Theologiae*, Ia Q27

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² See *Summa Theologiae* Ia Q28,3 and IaQ30,2 and IaQ36,1

⁴³ *ST I*, 151.

⁴⁴ *Summa Theologiae* Ia Q36.

⁴⁵ Vladimir Lossky, *In the Image and Likeness of God* (Crestwood NY: St. Vladimir's Press, (1974),77. Hereafter abbreviated, Lossky, *Image*, and page.

impersonal nature proceeding in an impersonal way. Ultimately, Lossky suggests that this leads away from the distinctiveness of the persons to an overemphasis on the unity and priority of the divine essence.⁴⁶ The end result of affirming the *filioque*, according to this critique, is that the hypostatic particularity of the Father is obscured and the personal particularity and actuality of the Spirit seems arbitrarily asserted.

While summarizing Lossky's argument, Jenson notes that 'Thomas' sort of thinking' is operative in the tradition as evidenced by Augustine and Lombard. Although both think of the Spirit as an active person distributing gifts as the gift of God, they both use an impersonal principle to distinguish the Spirit from the Son and the Father. As an example, Jenson cites Lombard's 'splendidly aphoristic summary: "thus there are precisely three: one who loves the one who is of him, and one who loves the one from whom he is, and the love, that itself cannot be insubstantial lest God be insubstantial."'⁴⁷ Why must love be substantial? Why must the Spirit be conceived of as a thing subsisting between the Father and the Son and subsequently recognized as personal? If there is a nature from which the Spirit can proceed, why would God be insubstantial without this procession?

III.3 The Eastern Response and Its Modalistic Assumption

In contrast to Western geometry, Jenson critiques the frozen and static conception of God that secures Eastern propositions. This critique is extreme but not far from the mark.⁴⁸ According to Jenson, this tendency is made clear in Lossky by his response to the Western counter question: why does the monarchy of the Father not imply the subordination of the Son and Spirit? Lossky's response is repeated in various ways; he suggest that divine being is beyond all becoming, all process, and beginning,⁴⁹ that

⁴⁶ In contrast, Lossky asserts that the personhood of the Father allows for proper distinction between the Father and the Son and between the Father and the Spirit; he explains, *Image*, 83-4, that 'the monarchy of the Father thus sets up irreversible relationships, which enable us to distinguish the two other hypostases from the Father, and yet to relate them to the Father, as a concrete principle of unity in the Trinity.'

⁴⁷ *Sententiarum libri quatuor*, 1.d.x.7, quoted by Jenson, *ST I*, 151.

⁴⁸ Dorteia Wendebourg, 'From the Cappadocian Fathers to Gregory of Palamas: the Defeat of Trinitarian Theology,' *Studia Patristica* 17, no. 1 (1982), 194-8, makes this case most directly and persuasively.

⁴⁹ Lossky, *Image*, 82.

the inaccessible nature of the Trinity is distinguished from its natural processions,⁵⁰ and that this unknown being is invoked as the unique Being *in* the three persons.⁵¹

In effect, Lossky suggests that the divine *ousia* is beyond all being, knowing, and so beyond ideas of priority or subordination. In this Lossky evokes the distinctions of *ousia*, *hypostasis* and *energia* to suggest that the inaccessible being of God is distinct from the economy of God. In this economy the energies are revealed as a mode of existence distinct from essence and hypostatic actuality. With respect to the Spirit he comes to a paradoxical conclusion that illustrates the problem; he writes ‘all that we know of the Holy Spirit refers to his economy; all that we do not know makes us venerate his Person.’⁵² This simple divide between the economy and the being of God illustrates the way in which reflection on the persons is separated from revelation. It also illustrates the way that the persons become separate from the economy and the being of God. For Jenson, this response in particular and this trajectory in general is bluntly modalistic. This is the case as it separates the *ousia* and *hypostasis* of the three persons from the life of God in the economy. In sum, Lossky’s response avoids subordinating the Son and Spirit because he asserts that the divine Being is above and so only in the Father, Son, and Spirit.

Jenson continues his critique and relates this problematic tendency in Lossky to the representative theologian of Byzantine Orthodoxy, Gregory Palamas. According to Jenson, this tendency towards modalism comes about as Gregory ‘adapted’ a key set of distinctions from the Cappadocians and sorted them out woodenly.⁵³ The end of this is a dualistic framework that divides the economy from the persons of God. In contrast, Jenson asserts that Gregory of Nyssa began with the three identities, suggested that their common life or energies is the proper referent of the phrase ‘the one God,’ and concluded that the divine *ousia* is the character that each identity exemplifies.⁵⁴ In this construction the divine *ousia* is not something other than the mutual life of the three, nor is it something merely in each of the three.

For Gregory Palamas, the divine *ousia* becomes God himself and so is separated from the action of God in creation.⁵⁵ Jenson notes that in Gregory’s total

⁵⁰ Lossky, *Image*, 89

⁵¹ Lossky, *Image*, 87.

⁵² Lossky, *Image*, 75.

⁵³ *ST I*, 152.

⁵⁴ *ST I*, 152-153.

⁵⁵ Jenson cites as an example *Chapters*, 133 (PG, CL: 1213c)

construction this entity is immune from the life of the creature connected to the Son and the events narrated in the gospels.⁵⁶ This comes about in part under the influence of the Dionysian tradition and in part through the attempt to make this apophatic tradition more radical.⁵⁷ He concludes with a contrast that reveals the disaster of this attempt; 'it is one thing to say that abstract deity is itself always the same quality, as the Cappadocians did; it is quite another to say that deity taken as God *himself* is static essence.'⁵⁸ This himself that is above and beyond the identities, above and beyond their life together, and their economy is as such the one God. The tendency is for this *arche* or 'nameless one' to assume the position of the real divine substance. The effect is that the being of God becomes as impersonal as the notion of divine nature that constrains Western reflection on the Spirit.

III.4 A Shared Flaw

This contrast between the East and the West reveals problematic tendencies in both directions. Although Western reflection on the relations between the Father, Son, and Spirit makes proper suggestions about the Son's role in sending the Spirit, these suggestions are stunted by problematic assumptions. As long as mutual opposition is limited to relations of origin there will be a tendency to relativize the persons to a general nature. Either the Son has to proceed from the Father and the Spirit or the *filioque* must be true. The result of this, as we have seen, is a reduction of the personhood of the Spirit. However, Eastern reflection on the Spirit in its formal and economic aspects is equally problematic in that the energies themselves become reified and separated from the economy. The effect is the abstracted energies replace the person in acts of salvation. For an example, Jenson quotes Gregory Palamas: 'grace is uncreated, and it is this that the Son gives and sends to his disciples and with which they are graced, and not the Spirit himself.'⁵⁹ What the disciples receive that

⁵⁶ ST I, 153.

⁵⁷ For a brief, but clear illustration of the relation between Gregory and Pseudo-Dionysius see Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Spirit of Eastern Christendom (600-1700)* (Chicago: University of London Press, 1974) pgs, 262,265, and 270.

⁵⁸ ST I, 153.

⁵⁹ ST I, 153,

has been called the Spirit is in fact called the Spirit because *it* is given by the Spirit.⁶⁰ Here again the modalist tendency within this tradition is apparent.

In neither case is the Spirit's role in the divine life being read from the totality of relations revealed in scripture.⁶¹ As a result, the Spirit's personhood is secured by equally impersonal means. In the West, an abstract logic constructs relations to personalize an otherwise impersonal bond. In the East, the Spirit's equality is guaranteed by distancing the Spirit along with the Father and the Son from the action described in the biblical narrative. In the end, neither position can accommodate the Spirit's role in creating, begetting or in the recreation of all things by the Father's love. In one case the tradition goes beyond revelation to assert a relation of origin that is not required by the biblical narrative. In the other, there is a temptation to leave revelation behind and remove God from the acts that make either or any procession meaningful. What is needed is a set of formal descriptions that can appropriate the variety of relations revealed in the biblical narrative with which and by which the Spirit is identified. We now turn to Jenson's attempt to develop such a set of descriptions.

IV. Jenson's Formal Identification of the Spirit

To suggest an alternative description of the Spirit's place in life of God, Jenson makes a familiar move to use Gregory of Nyssa. As was noted above, Jenson reads Gregory's distinctions between *hypostasis*, *energia*, and *ousia* as flexible and interconnected descriptions of God's personal diversity and essential unity. He suggests that in Gregory's conception the identities are each God, the complex of their energies is their common life, and the *ousia* is the infinity of the mutual life that each identity perfectly exemplifies. In this, the Spirit's deity is not a thing or even an infinite something. Instead, the Spirit receives being and existence from the Father, which is revealed in shared action or *energia* with the Father and the Son. This given, Jenson implies that the key conceptual move is to avoid the suggestion that the *ousia* is something other than the divine life. The *ousia* of God is not the source of the

⁶⁰ Gregory Palamas, *Triads*, 3.1.9; quoted by Jenson, *ST I*, 158.

⁶¹ A chief example, which we will return to later, is the role of the Spirit in the begetting of the Son which is suggested in Luke's account of the virgin birth.

Spirit's being, nor can there be relations between the Father and the Son that preclude the Spirit's participation in the common life of God. Instead, there are relations of origin and of mutual participation that determine the person of the Spirit and the life of the Father and the Son.

IV.1 The Application of Eastern Distinctions

With this in mind Jenson begins by suggesting that 'the Father is the source of the Spirit's *being*, of his sheer givenness as an other than the Father or the Son, but the Spirit's *energies*, his participation and agency in the triune life, come to him from the Father through the Son or, it can even be said, from the Father and the Son.'⁶² In this limited set of trinitarian propositions the Spirit receives his being from the Father; the Spirit exists as a person in the triune community because the Father causes his existence. In other words, the Spirit exemplifies the character of infinite liveliness because he is breathed by the Father to participate in the triune life of God as a distinct *hypostasis* or identity of God. This description of the being of the Spirit assumes that all divine life begins with the Father and that the Spirit's coming forth from the Father is an eternal coming forth that is not surpassed.⁶³

In addition, the Spirit's role in the divine life is described as actual through the Son. Being breathed by the Father, the Spirit's existence is actual only as he is with the Father *and* Son. This is specified as Jenson suggests that the Spirit receives his energy from the Father through Son as he exists or acts with the Father and Son. Jenson makes the point directly and suggests that 'the Spirit receives his existence from the Father, but lives eternally with and in the Son.'⁶⁴ What the Spirit is and has is not separated from his life with the Father and the Son. The energy of the Spirit is actual as it is constituted in relation to the Son, who receives and sends the Spirit.⁶⁵ This existence with and through the Son is not separate from his receiving being from the Father of this same Son. In sum, the Spirit proceeds from the Father to be with the Son and Father one God in mutually constituting unity.

⁶² *ST I*, 158.

⁶³ John 15:26.

⁶⁴ *ST I*, 159.

⁶⁵ John 15:26, again.

In *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*, Jürgen Moltmann makes a set of similar suggestions to clarify the Spirit's being and form in the triune life.⁶⁶ Following Boris Bolotov, Moltmann suggests that the Spirit proceeds from the Father of the Son and receives his form from the Father and the Son. To develop this suggestion Moltmann makes a distinction between the divine existence or substance and the perichoretic life of the Father, Son, and Spirit. The point of this is to distinguish between the constitution and the inner life of the Trinity.⁶⁷ This distinction allows Moltmann to suggest that the Spirit proceeds solely from the Father, who is known only as the Father in his mutual existence with the Son. On this basis, Moltmann describes an indirect participation of the Son in the procession of the Spirit from the Father and a direct and formative relation of the Son with the Spirit in the triune life. Relative to the inner triune life Moltmann affirms the *filioque*, but demands that 'it must be kept well away from the procession of the Holy Spirit.'⁶⁸

Two aspects of Moltmann's construction are open to criticism. First, Moltmann fails to recognize the problematic tendencies of this trajectory, which tends to divide the economic and immanent trinities.⁶⁹ Second, Moltmann's construction necessitates the begetting of the Son prior to the procession of the Spirit. Pannenberg criticizes Moltmann for this and the consequent inability of Moltmann's formula to accommodate the Spirit's anointing of the Son and his active role in the Son's obedience to the Father.⁷⁰ Another apparent problem is the way that Moltmann seems to describe a relation between the Father and the Son that precludes the Spirit. Jenson's more exact definition of the relation and distinction between the *energia* and *ousia* and his more open-ended formula mediate against both of these criticisms. In Jenson's use of these distinctions there is sufficient mutual determination between all three persons to clarify the Spirit's active role in the life of the triune God. Moreover,

⁶⁶ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*, tr. Margaret Kohl (London, SCM Press: 1998) 178-190. Hereafter abbreviated Moltmann, *Trinity*, and page.

⁶⁷ Moltmann, *Trinity*, 183.

⁶⁸ Moltmann, *Trinity*, 187.

⁶⁹ R. Olson, 'Trinity and Eschatology: The Historical Being of God in Jürgen Moltmann and Wolfart Pannenberg,' *Scottish Journal of Theology* 36 (1983), 225, criticizes Moltmann for developing levels within his doctrine of God as a result of this distinction and his defense of the Monarchy of the Father.

⁷⁰ Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, vol. I tr. Geoffery Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991) 318-9, n181; 325.

he describes this active and determining presence without separating the being and act of God.⁷¹

Despite this clarity, Jenson recognizes that this construal of the divine life could be terribly abstract and practically confusing. This would be the case if these distinctions remained within the traditional framework of apophatic theology. This would also be the case if it was assumed that only relations of origin are appropriate to the divine life. Instead of remaining within the confines, Jenson tries to appropriate the eschatological character of the gospel story to make these descriptions concrete and hermeneutically relevant. The point of this is to ground the Spirit's place in God by recognizing a dynamic of mutual significance beyond origin. In sum, Jenson suggests that 'the life that the Spirit enables as the divine life has its plot from the Son's relations to the Father *and to the Spirit*.'⁷² This means that triune life freely but truly includes eschatological aspects that are essential to each triune person's being and existence. The effect of these formal distinctions is to enable reading the 'various active relations between the Spirit as whom God is future to himself, and the Father and the Son whose future he is'⁷³ as the truth about God. Having specified origin we have only begun to identify each person of God. Continuing and identifying the relations that are actual in the divine life, it is essential to appreciate and confess how the triune God's life is freely determined in its protological and eschatological aspects.

IV.2 The Hermeneutical Relevance of Formal Propositions

The language of gifting, glorifying, fulfilling, and resting upon has been considered inappropriate to the eternal triune life. In contrast, Jenson reads these active relations from the narrative as the truth about God and the eternal relations between the identities of God. In the process these relations indicate relations of opposition between the persons that do not reduce or relegate the person of the Spirit. This

⁷¹ In Moltmann's formula the prior begetting of the Son is a logical necessity for the procession of the Spirit. As a result of this priority Moltmann seems to subordinate the Spirit to the Son even as he asserts that the processions occur simultaneously. This formal subordination happens despite the fact that Moltmann recognizes various patterns of relation in God corresponding to the eschatological nature of God's being at other places.

⁷² *ST I*, 159, emphasis added.

⁷³ *ST I*, 158.

opens up exegetical possibilities throughout the gospel narratives that clarify how the Spirit is personal in relation to the Father and the Son. What the Spirit does in relation to the incarnate Son identifies the Spirit's mode of being in God's infinite and eternal being. For example, the Spirit is active in the begetting of this Son from Mary. Likewise, the Spirit rests on the Son to enable his obedience as the power of prophetic and kingly missions. This one and the same Spirit is the power of the Son's miraculous deeds and the possibility of new life that is anticipated in his life with and for others. In a difficult passage Jenson suggests that the Spirit is the power of God's unity or the bond of love even in and through the abandonment and death of the Son.⁷⁴ In other words, the Spirit reconciles the Father to the Son, who dies as the chief of sinners.⁷⁵ In these acts this one person of God enables the Father and Son to fulfill the will and past decision of the Father and live in perfect love throughout this chosen life.

In all these acts the Spirit is the power of God's liveliness and the love that enables the Son to love and serve the Father. Conversely, the Spirit empowers the Father to serve and love this human person as his only begotten Son. As this power of God the Spirit acts with the Son as one opposed to the Son. As an example, Jenson cites John 16.14: 'the Spirit "glorifies" the Son because he "takes what belongs" to the son and "declares" it.'⁷⁶ Herein, the Spirit is another paraclete. The Spirit leads the disciples in the way of truth as he speaks what he hears and brings the life that the Son receives from the Father. Like the Son, but differently, this messenger of truth comes from the Father to convict the world of sin and unite the disciples in love with each other and with the Father through the Son. This action of the Spirit glorifies the Son and the Father and reveals his unity with and distinction from these two. This one acts in this way and can do this with us for Christ because of his place in the triune life. Like the Son, he has his being from the Father. And, like the Son the Spirit exists in perfect mutuality with the two other identities of God.

⁷⁴ *ST I*, 191.

⁷⁵ This alone can justify Jenson's claim that the Father and Son's life together needs the active presence of the Spirit to avoid a Hegelian dialectic of slave and master; Jenson's use of Hegel at this point is inessential and dangerous. Moreover, it opens Jenson's trinitarian description to an easy critique that obscures an essential insight into the life of the triune God.

⁷⁶ *ST I*, 158.

Two other examples can help to explain and expound Jenson's identification of the Spirit. In each, Jenson's suggestion that the Spirit proceeds from the Father and exists or acts with the Son is clarified. First, at the end of John chapter twenty, the risen Lord Jesus appears to the disciples and greets them with a word of peace. After this, Jesus greets them with a second word of peace and then sends them as he was sent by the Father. While speaking these words of mission and direction Jesus breathes on the disciples and tells them to receive the Holy Spirit. In this encounter Jesus makes it clear that the disciples are being sent by God in the way that he was sent; they will do what he had done in the same way that he did his work.⁷⁷ This specific promise is immediately realized as Jesus gives the Spirit to establish and empower the disciples. They receive the Spirit as Christ did to do their work in the way he did his work. Just as the Son comes from the Father in the Spirit the disciples go into the world in obedience to the one who now sends them out into the world. As the Son breathes the Spirit, the Spirit rests on the disciples, who in the power of the Spirit go into the world to glorify the Father and the Son.

In this complex of relations there is opposition and relation between the Son and Spirit that distinguishes the two and testifies to their mutual relation to the Father and the disciples. Whereas the *filioque* can recognize the essential relation of the Spirit to Christ that is made obvious in this action, it cannot recognize the implied relation between the Spirit and the Son that precedes this action. Before Jesus gives the Spirit as his Spirit, he receives the Spirit and is empowered in his mission. The disciples are sent as Jesus was sent; they go as they have received the Spirit. The Son comes into the world in obedience to the Father. This is actual only as he received the Spirit and lives and moves in the power of this same Spirit. Taking this set of relations as actual in God requires the recognition that the Spirit is active in the sending of the Son. These relations between God and God that are operative in John's narrative are more complex than a limited set of relations of origin can suggest or describe. In contrast to the *filioque's* limited focus on the Spirit's sub-ordination to the Son, John describes the Son's life is determined by his relation to the Father and the Spirit. This is possible because the Spirit proceeds from the Father to facilitate or empower the Son's sending.

⁷⁷ This was also made clear in John 17:18: 'Just as you sent me into the World, so I sent them into the world.'

The second illustration comes from Jenson's reflections on the Church. While discussing the Church's founding, Jenson suggests that 'Pentecost is the Spirit's particular personal initiative to delay the Parousia: when the Spirit descends eschatologically yet without raising all the dead and ending the age, the time of the church is opened.'⁷⁸ Central to Jenson's concerns is the insight that the Spirit has a specific and active role in founding the Church. Jenson specifies this by suggesting that 'the Spirit founds the church by giving himself to be her Spirit and so freeing a community within this age to be appropriate for union with a person risen into the eschatological future.'⁷⁹ This implies that Pentecost is an intervention of the triune God that is new and different from the Resurrection. This event is not merely appropriated to the person of the Spirit. Instead, it reveals his personal particularity as he is active in the triune life to glorify the Father and the Son. In this event and in the continued founding of the Church, the Spirit is active to free 'an actual human community from merely historical determinisms, to be apt to be united with the Son and thus to be the gateway of creation's translation into God.'⁸⁰ Jenson continues and explains that the Spirit was 'poured out' to make a prophetic community that is enlivened and empowered as they are *in* Christ Jesus.⁸¹ This person of God acts in relation to and in distinction from the Father and Spirit. In other words, the Spirit is the one who brings God's people to the Son and unites them with the Son who mediates their access to the Father. In and through this action the Spirit is clearly known as one who is other than the Father and Son. Additionally, the Spirit is known as the Spirit of God, Christ and the church.

In Jenson's identification of this person of God, the Spirit is 'God coming from and as his Kingdom.'⁸² This one comes as himself, but not by himself. He comes as he proceeds from the Father and is sent by the Father and the Son. This coming is a new and different event within the history of God with his people. It is a triune event and so not one that implies any separation between God and God. Nevertheless, this event reveals an essential distinction in God as it reveals the person of the Spirit. The Spirit that comes and rest on the church to glorify Christ is an identity of God. This person of God can be invoked, can be addressed, and can

⁷⁸ *ST* II, 178-9.

⁷⁹ *ST* II, 182.

⁸⁰ *ST* II, 179

⁸¹ *ST* II, 181, citing Romans 8:1-11.

⁸² *ST* I, 219.

address those that he gathers in Christ. When identified by and with these relations the Spirit is known as a person of God.

V. Is Pentecost a Peer of Easter?

Jenson description of the Spirit focuses on the active role of the Spirit in the life of Christ, in the life of the community that the Spirit gathers around and in Christ, and on this community's founding at Pentecost. Even as Jenson interprets this event to identify this person of God, he recognizes that there is 'a plain sense in which the church was founded by the acts of the Son narrated in the Gospel...For it is the Son's whole life, from his conception by the Holy Spirit to his Ascension, that in fact founds the church.'⁸³ Moreover, the related work of the Spirit is 'not separate from that of Christ but nevertheless distinct and of equal weight.'⁸⁴ It is distinct as it an act of the Spirit in time to unite this same Christ in his resurrected life with his community and bring them to the Father. It is equal as it is an event in the triune God's life by which and with which an identity of God is known. In this way, the Spirit is doubly identified as the power of God to raise the dead and to raise up a community of faith in hope for the Kingdom. By recognizing and describing this work as the particular work of this triune *hypostasis*, Jenson gives an answer to his own question: Is Pentecost a peer of Easter or does it display a meaning that Easter would in any case have?⁸⁵

V.1 The Objective Actuality of the Gospel, Christ and the Spirit

Jenson presents this question about Pentecost and the Spirit as one 'endlessly pressed on the West by Orthodoxy.'⁸⁶ The alternative answer is one affirmed by Karl Barth,

⁸³ *ST II*, 183.

⁸⁴ *ST I*, 179.

⁸⁵ John Zizioulas, 'Christ, the Spirit and the Church' in *Being as Communion* (Crestwood NY: St. Vladimir's Press, 2002), 123-142, offers a concise history of modern Orthodox interpretation of Pneumatology relative to Christology. Interestingly, he argues, against Nissiotis and Borbrinskoy, that Pentecost is an aspect of the one Christ event in history. To argue otherwise, according to Zizioulas, is to make the Spirit historical and obscure his eschatological character. Jenson, of course, would object to this as a false dichotomy.

⁸⁶ *ST I*, 146.

which brings us back to our mode of comparison between Barth and Jenson. This is made somewhat easier in this chapter as Jenson uses Barth as an example of a particular problem common to Western reflection on the Spirit. According to Jenson, the common factor in Western problems with the Spirit 'is a tendency of the Spirit simply to disappear from theology's description of God's triune action.'⁸⁷ Given this tendency, the event of Pentecost is then interpreted as a coming of Christ in a different form. The significance of this event is implied in his previous appearance to the disciples after the Resurrection. In Barth's view there is one coming of the one and the same Lord Jesus Christ that is not or cannot be surpassed. He explains that 'the New Testament knows of only one coming of the One who has come. It is not thereby excluded that this occurs in differing forms, at times he chooses and in circumstances he orders....It occurs in the time of the church and also in the form of the distribution of the Spirit.'⁸⁸

This answer, like Barth's other descriptions of the Spirit, illustrate, according to Jenson the Western tendency toward binitarian reflection on triune action. Ultimately, Jenson suggests that 'the reason this happens seems clear: it is Barth's unquestioning devotion to the West's standard teaching that the Spirit is the bond of love between the Father and the Son.'⁸⁹ To illustrate the effects of this, Jenson critiques Barth's description of the Spirit's eschatological and ecclesial activity. In both cases, Jenson suggests that the 'Spirit abandons the action to the Father and the Son.'⁹⁰ Jenson's first example is chosen from Barth's discussion of the objectivity of the gospel's proclamation. According to Barth, the objectivity of the gospel is grounded on its historical priority, the Resurrection and ultimately the activity of the risen Lord. This is a critical insight, but one that is confused when explained in relation to Christ's individual agency. Barth explains that

In His glory He radiates His being and action for the world out from Himself in to the world in order that it may share it. In His revelation, shining as light, He discloses and manifests and announces and imparts Himself, moving out from Himself to where He and His being and work are not yet known and perceived, to where there is not yet any awareness of the alteration in Him of

⁸⁷ *ST I*, 153.

⁸⁸ Karl Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik*, vol. 4/3 (Zurich: Evangelischer Verlag, 1959), 338; quoted by Jenson, *ST I*, 146.

⁸⁹ *ST I*, 155.

⁹⁰ *ST I*, 156.

the situation between God and man.⁹¹

As this quote illustrates, Barth fails to recognize that the Spirit is the power of the prophets in Scripture and the power of this particular prophet; the repetitive use of Him/He overshadows the reality that He works with and in the Spirit. Christological reflection that obscures the Son's relation to the Father or the Spirit is problematic.

In Jenson's diagnoses, the heart of the problem is that the Spirit is never characterized 'as a personal agent either of the risen Lord's prophesying or of our hearing it.'⁹² Jenson implies that the consequence is an under-evaluation of the Church and the agency of the Spirit as objective realities in Christian experience.⁹³ Instead of the Spirit bringing the Son into the centre of the Church to ground the gospel's objectivity there is only the universal prophet. This one is at the centre of the circle for Barth as the Son who acts as the primary agent of reconciliation, redemption and revelation. The Son acts to gather the church as the circumference of this circle. In this way, He is a prophet and universally significant because he is the Word. Jenson notes the irony of this individualistic description by pointing out that this failure occurs in a section entitled 'The Promise of the Spirit.'

Jenson's second example comes from a 'relatively brief but vital passage.'⁹⁴ In this passage Barth specifies the ecclesial reality of the Spirit as he discusses the ingathering, enlightening, and sanctifying of Christ's community. According to

⁹¹ CD, 4/3, 280.

⁹² ST I, 154. On the issue of personal and agential language, George Hunsinger, 'Karl Barth's doctrine of the Holy Spirit' in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, ed. John Webster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pg180, n5, suggests that Barth's idiom and his focus on Christ's activity and agency is appropriate to the doctrine of reconciliation and so has a christocentric focus. He explains that Barth does not hold a merely non-agential view of the Spirit as he uses agential and non-agential language in general. While this is certainly true of Barth use in general, Jenson's critique is more exact as it suggests that christocentric language, and especially language about Christ in his role as the universal prophet, must include description of the Spirit's empowering presence. In all of Christ's life this person is an agent who acts mutually with Christ in all of his acts as the Son who makes the Father known; focusing on reconciliation doesn't change this.

⁹³ Robert Jenson, 'You Wonder Where the Spirit Went,' *Pro Ecclesia* vol. II, no3 (1997), 302-3, is more direct in his diagnoses of Barth's pneumatological deficiency. He writes that 'perhaps the final reason for the whole web of Spirit-avoidance in the Kirchliche Dogmatik is avoidance of the church...If the Community between the Father and the Son were himself an *agent* of their love, immanently and economically, then the church, as the community inspired by this Agent, would be the active *mediatrix* of faith.'

⁹⁴ *Kirchliche Dogmatik*, vol. 4/3 (Zurich: Evangelischer Verlag, 1959), 867-872.

Jenson, Barth's description of the Spirit overlooks his personal actuality in this work. He explains that 'it is invariably Christ himself who is specified as the agent, with the Spirit denoted only by impersonal terms, as a capacity of Christ.'⁹⁵ Jenson notes that the Spirit appears as the power of Christ, which he recognizes is not wrong. However, the Spirit is in Jenson's judgment an impersonal power of an otherwise personal God. Christ is active to gather and constitute the church, but is not empowered by the Spirit to be the apostle and high priest of his community. Instead, he merely uses his power to gather and rule this community, the event of which is the Spirit. According to Jenson, this is, of course, not wrong, it is simply inadequate. It is so because it fails to recognize the mutuality between the Son and the Spirit in this action through which both are active and personal.

Most generally, Jenson has a problem with the way in which Barth describes the work of the Spirit as the coordination of the being of Jesus Christ and his earthly community.⁹⁶ Barth specifies that this work is like the work of the Spirit in the life of God where two different things are unified. In this case the Spirit constitutes and guarantees that there is correspondence between Christ and the Father, and between Christ and his community.⁹⁷ In sum, Jenson suggests the Spirit, for Barth, is the relation of correspondence itself by which a two-sided relationship in God is replicated and made actual in the human community.⁹⁸ He goes further and suggests that 'the Spirit appears not as a person with capacities but as the personal Trinity's capacity to evoke an echo of his own intentions in other subjectivities than himself.'⁹⁹ Clearly, the focal point of Jenson's critique is a particular conception of the Holy

⁹⁵ ST I, 154; Jenson cites two examples: 'the power of Jesus Christ's being' (868) and 'the godly power [Gottesmacht] unique to the being of Jesus Christ, in the exercise of which,' (869.)

⁹⁶ CD 4/3, 860.

⁹⁷ In the last paragraphs of this sub-section Barth does seem to describe the Spirit as active in this event in a way that is suggestive of personal agency and mutual empowering. The Spirit is the one who constitutes and guarantees the unity of the *totus Christus* (760); likewise, Barth suggests that the event of coordination 'all takes place in the gracious act of the gracious power of the Holy Spirit...In virtue of this gracious act it is always true and actual that the Head does not live without His body nor the body without the head...In virtue of the gracious act of the Holy Spirit...there exists and persists...the people of His witnesses in world-occurrence.' (762) Again, the question is not whether Barth uses agential language, but whether he does so in a properly trinitarian way.

⁹⁸ ST I, 155.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

Spirit as an impersonal bond of love or as the mere means of God's acts. From any such conception, Jenson suggests that 'it follows that the inner-divine community of the Father and the Son is, explicitly, "two-sided;" the Spirit is the fellowship itself and so *not* a partner thereof.'¹⁰⁰ Instead of appearing as a person in the triune community, the Spirit is the mode of causation by which this community and subsequent communities are actualized. Jenson concludes that such Western doctrine 'displays what can only be called an "I-Thou" trinitarianism.'¹⁰¹ In this the Spirit is not someone that can be addressed or invoked, but is instead an eternal something existing between two persons.

In contrast to this potentially binitarian framework, Jenson attempts to describe the Spirit as the bond of love between the Father and Son who is antecedently actual to their relatedness. In keeping with this, Jenson describes the Son's begetting: 'the Father begets the Son, but it is the Spirit who presents this Son to his Father as an object of the love that begot him, that is, to be actively loved.' Jenson continues and suggest that the same dynamics of being freed to love are actual for the Son's fellowship with the Father: 'the Son adores the Father, but it is the Spirit who shows the Father to the Son not merely as ineffable Source but as the available and lovable Father.'¹⁰² Summarizing this line of thought, Jenson concludes that 'the Spirit is himself one who intends love, who thus liberates and glorifies those on whom he "rests;" and therefore the immediate objects of his intention, the Father and the Son, love each other, with a love that is identical with the Spirit's gift of himself to each of them.'¹⁰³ For Jenson, the Spirit's activity to bring the Son into the world and to sustain the Son in his mission are both revelatory of his place and role in the divine life. He is active to mediate the relation of the Father and the Son in Christ's mission and in the eternal relations of the Godhead.

¹⁰⁰ *ST I*, 155.

¹⁰¹ *ST I*, 155.

¹⁰² *Ibid.* Neither Barth's model of identity-in-difference that is illustrated by marriage, nor Jenson's particular Hegelian way of arguing for the agency of the Spirit is particularly helpful here; see *CD 3/2*, paragraph 45 and *ST I*, 156. Jenson's point that is made in this example is better illustrated by the agency of the Spirit in and through the passion of Christ and especially in relation to Holy Saturday. If the Spirit is the bond of love that unites the Father and Son through death for sinners, then there is a role of reconciliation that the Spirit plays in the life of God that avoids damnation and dominion, but this is a very different way of thinking and explaining this.

¹⁰³ *ST I*, 158.

In sum, Jenson describes the Trinity within a model of three persons in communion where the Spirit's role is clarified by his action in his mission. For example, the Spirit is active to intend love and to liberate the church and so glorify the Son and the Father. In and through this action the Spirit grounds the objectivity of the gospel. This is the case because the Spirit acts to unite the church to Christ, while making the Lordship of Christ over the church insuperable. In both cases this one person is active to free others for love and relationship where there is mutuality, unity and distinction. At first, this description of the Spirit seems to respect the personal actuality of the Spirit in his life with church. As well, it moves beyond the impression that there are two independent subjects, the Father and the Son or the Trinity and the church, who are united in a relation of opposition where the Spirit is the hyphen of successful relation. In addition, this model seems to move beyond a subordination of the Spirit that can follow from the logic of *filioque* trinitarianism. In the following comparison this first impression must be substantiated and grounded on scripture's witness to the life and person of the Spirit.

V.2 A Common Assumption and a Critical Difference

To compare and contrast these two models of the Trinity it is helpful to look at a common assumption, an exegetical issue and the capacity of each of the proceeding descriptions to answer this exegetical question. In *Church Dogmatics* I/1 Barth asserts that material dogmatic statements about the immanent Trinity *can* and *must* be taken from definitions of the modes of being in revelation.¹⁰⁴ This straight-forward rule suggests that 'statements about the divine modes of being antecedently in themselves cannot be different in content from those that are made about their reality in revelation.'¹⁰⁵ Barth continues and concludes that 'we must abide by distinction and unity of the modes of being of God as they encounter us according to the witness of scripture in the reality of God in his revelation.'¹⁰⁶ As has been noted throughout, Jenson's approach to the doctrine of the Trinity and the description of each person depends on this same methodology; consequently, he assumes that 'the very function

¹⁰⁴ *CD* I/1, 485.

¹⁰⁵ *CD* I/1, 479.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

of trinitarian propositions [is] to say that the relations that appear in biblical narrative between the Father, Son, and the Spirit are the truth about God himself.¹⁰⁷

On the basis of this shared assumption Barth defends the *filioque* as superior to the Eastern conception of internal relations. He does so because the latter does not read off from revelation its statements about the being of God.¹⁰⁸ In contrast, the *filioque* rightly interprets and appropriates the breathing of the Spirit by Christ as the action of God that is possible because it is antecedently actual in God's eternal being. That the Spirit is called the Spirit of Christ in revelation affirms both the action and the correspondence. These two points of clarity in revelation are then read in light of this ruling assumption to justify the *filioque* as a valid expression of God's self-revelation. If Christ gives the Spirit, which is rightly called his own, then there must be an essential and unsurpassable relation of origin that secures the relation of the Spirit to the Son. As this relation is posited by the *filioque* the unity of the Trinity is described as the unity of the Father and the Son.¹⁰⁹

Following this Barth asks a question: Is it necessary to assert a procession of the Son from the Father and the Spirit to respect the role of the Spirit in creating and the begetting of the Son?¹¹⁰ Barth notes several instances of the Spirit's role to create faith and beget the children of God; he also notes that these same dynamics pertain to Christ as the Son of God. This one and the same is described by Mark in motifs of adoption, in the motif of ascension and enthronement by Paul, but most demanding is the description of the Spirit's action in the conception of Christ. In Luke the Spirit comes to Mary and covers her as the power of the Most High. As a result, the child born is by birth called the Son of God. Mathew even describes this child as coming from the Spirit. Although Luke more explicitly emphasizes the action of the Spirit in the action of begetting, Mathew's description emphatically suggests a relation of origin that could demand a corresponding definition of the modes of being. Should this action of the Spirit in the begetting of Jesus necessitate a trinitarian proposition that corresponds to and grounds this action of God with God? *Can* we, or *must* we, read these relations between the Spirit and the Son into the being of God? If so must we define a procession of the Son from the Spirit and Father?

¹⁰⁷ *ST* I, 150.

¹⁰⁸ *CD* I/1, 480.

¹⁰⁹ *CD* I/1, 482-483.

¹¹⁰ *CD* I/1, 485.

Barth's response to this question, which he interprets as an objection to the *filioque*, is ultimately unconvincing. To begin, he suggests that this action of the Holy Spirit is not commensurate to the eternal begetting of the Son by the Father, nor to the eternal breathing of the Spirit by the Father and the Son. What this relation lacks, according to Barth, is an internal and self-contained perfection; the virgin birth and the other acts of the Spirit are 'always a bringing forth from some other essence whose existence is presupposed.'¹¹¹ For Barth this is seen clearly in the work of the Spirit to make all believers the children of God, as is described in John 3. In a similar way, the action of the Spirit in the conception of Jesus is only relevant to the temporal begetting of the flesh made one with the Son.¹¹² This birth is then interpreted as a parallel to the other events of adoption or exaltation where the humanity of Christ is raised to be one with the divinity of the Son. This pattern is clear for Barth in Paul's description of 'the exaltation and revelation of Him who was crucified and who died to the glory of the Son of God.'¹¹³ Barth explains that this one who was hitherto called Jesus Christ is now by the action of the Spirit called the Son of God.

As a result of this distinction and limitation, Barth concludes that the Son owes nothing to the Spirit in his begetting. Instead, there is a limit to the Spirit's action and a qualification of his relation to the Son. Because of this limitation his action in revelation is not commensurate to the begetting of the Son by the Father in eternity; the Son is the son by essence, which he shares with the Father, not by an act of the Holy Spirit to bring about his birth. Although revelation suggests that the Son is begotten by the Father through the Spirit, Barth limits and qualifies this relation as one pertaining exclusively in God's gracious action *ad extra*. In the end, what appeared as an objection to the *filioque* is seen as a confirmation of the Spirit's

¹¹¹ KB CD I/1, 485.

¹¹² In this interpretation of the incarnation and the limitation of the Spirit's role in the begetting of the Son, Barth follows a line of reasoning that is made possible at Chalcedon, but was also made explicit by Augustine: *The Trinity*, Book XV, 46. Augustine appropriates the different actions of the Spirit to the different natures in general, and specifically relates and limits the action of the Spirit in the begetting of Jesus Christ to the joining of the human nature to the Word; he explains that 'this is why we confess that he was born of the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary.' That this economic relation does not challenge Augustine's conception of the Spirit's role in the life of the Trinity is made clear by his explicit affirmation of the Spirit's procession from the Son that follows this passage in response to the question of whether the Spirit proceeded from the Father before the begetting of the Son. See *The Trinity*, XV, 47.

¹¹³ CD I/1, 480.

capacity to mediate the fellowship between God the Son and his flesh. The relation that appears in revelation is not then interpreted as a relation between God and God, but a relation between God and humanity mediated by the Spirit.

Given Barth's limiting explanation, it seems possible to disregard the breathing of the Spirit by Christ as it presupposes the pre-existent nature of the disciples humanity.¹¹⁴ If this is the case is it necessary to suggest that the Spirit proceeds from the Son? When this possibility is noted this can only seem odd and ultimately self-contradicting. Critiquing the separation of God's being and his acts *ad extra*, Barth writes 'the reality of God in His revelation cannot be bracketed by an "only," as though somewhere behind His revelation there stood another reality of God; the reality of God which encounters us in His revelation is His reality in all the depths of his eternity.'¹¹⁵ With regard to the Holy Spirit, Barth clarifies that 'this means that He is the Spirit of both the Father and the Son not just in his work *ad extra* and upon us, but that to all eternity-no limit or reservation is possible here.'¹¹⁶ Is Barth's whole insight and outlook lost when he picks and chooses which acts of God acting with and for God are revelatory of his internal relations?

Jenson's answer to this exegetical question can be illustrated through his description of the Spirit. Jenson describes the Spirit's procession into and existence within the triune life in two ways: first, as the one who proceeds from the Father to be the possibility of procession, and, second, as the one who has his being from the Father, but exists with the Son in perfect mutual relatedness. Aspects of these descriptions are clear in his limit set of trinitarian relations; 'the Father begets the Son and freely breathes his Spirit; the Spirit liberates the Father for the Son and the Son from and for the Father; the Son is begotten and liberated, and so reconciles the Father with the future his Spirit is.'¹¹⁷ What Jenson description accommodates is what neither the Eastern or Western tradition notes and appropriates: that the Son's begetting is through the Spirit's action just as the Spirit's action is mediated by the

¹¹⁴ Given that it is the risen Jesus who breathes the Spirit, this relation between God and the God-man could be limited to the possibility that this God-man can give the Spirit. As such, it would not tell us about the relation between God and God, but between the flesh of this mediator and his divine actuality.

¹¹⁵ *CD I/1*, 479-80.

¹¹⁶ *CD I/1*, 479.

¹¹⁷ *ST I*, 161.

begotten son, or better said is inseparable from the Son.¹¹⁸ This mutual dependence implies relations of an essential nature that are not necessarily relations of origin. The distinctions that Jenson makes between the *ousia*, *energia*, and *hypostasis* of God allows for appropriation of relations other than relations of origin and the assertion that these relations are constitutive of God's eternal being.

Luke's narrative is not a problem for Jenson. Instead, it presents a beckoning opportunity to clarify the relation of the Spirit to the Son as one of empowering, resting on, and of facilitating his birth. As a consequence, this identity's agency and role in the triune life is more clearly described. In sum, Jenson's trinitarian propositions allow for the reality and actuality of these relationships within God and the reality of the Spirit's dependence on the Son. The Son is begotten in the power of the Spirit as the Spirit is the person of God who frees the Father for the Son and the Son for the Father. Likewise, the Spirit is the Spirit that comes as the end and goal of all God's ways, as love that is given its decisive shape by the life of Christ. Both of these relations between God and God are givens in the biblical narrative that can and must be appropriated in dogmatic description of the persons of God and their internal relations.-

Despite this flexibility that comes with greater technical distinction, there is one issue that is not made clear in Jenson's limit set of trinitarian descriptions. The Spirit is related to and dependant on the Son, but is the Spirit the Spirit of Christ as well as the Spirit of the Father? This one and the same Son of Mary receives the Spirit, but does Jenson make clear that Christ give the Spirit in his name as his own? Jenson's description of the risen Lord as the prophet who becomes apostle and high priest suggests that the Spirit is Christ's to give and send to his people.¹¹⁹ But his description of the Spirit concludes with the affirmation that 'the Spirit's derivation of his being from the Father is never surpassed: the Spirit remains and is the spirit of

¹¹⁸ John Zizioulas, 'Christ, the Spirit and the Church,' 127, notes both sides of this relative to the canonical witness; he explains that 'in the New Testament writings themselves we come across both the view that the Spirit is given *by* Christ...and the view that there is, so to say, *no* Christ until the Spirit is at work, not only as a *forerunner* announcing his coming, but also as the one who *constitutes his very identity as Christ*.' Jenson's particular extension of this is to integrate Christology and Pneumatology as Zizioulas requests, but also to think of God's being as communion in light of this integration.

¹¹⁹ ST I, 192.

someone; he is the *ruach* of the God of Israel.¹²⁰ Having appropriated the necessary point that the Spirit is active in the birth, life, and eternal rule of the Son, does Jenson abandon the Paul's naming of the Spirit as *pneuma christou*?

Once again, Jenson's assertion that there is distinction without separation between the being and the energy of God is critical at this point. If there was a divide between the being of God and the mutual life that the three identities share as their *energia*, then any description of the Spirit as the Spirit of Christ would confuse the being and energy. However, if there is only distinction between the being and the energy, then the Spirit is never separate from the Son. In this sense the Spirit is the Spirit of the Son whose existence with the Son determines his eternal action and being. More directly Jenson's description of the Spirit suggests that the Spirit is the Spirit of Christ and even the Spirit of Church, insofar as it is the *totus Christus*.¹²¹

This is the deepest mystery of the particular existence of the Spirit who 'himself is nothing other than the Freedom that occurs in these relations.'¹²² For Jenson, the Spirit is personal as an identity of God who is from the Father and actual through the Son, but nevertheless gives himself freely to others in love as love. In this sense the Western teaching on the Spirit as the bond of love reappears as it is reinterpreted through Jenson's focus on hypostatic agency. The Spirit is the person of God who exists and has being in communion with Father and the Son as the gift given to enliven creation and unite creation in perfection with the Father and the Son. He is given, but is active in the giving and personal in the act as a person of God. In this mysterious way the Spirit is and has his being with Jesus, the God of Israel, and the human community identified by and with them.

Jenson uses a limited set of descriptions and a flexible system of distinctions to identify and describe the Spirit in response to the content of the biblical narrative. These distinctions and descriptions make it clear that the Spirit is the Spirit of God and the Spirit of Christ. This one proceeds from the Father to be with the Son as the Spirit of the Father who gives himself to the Church to unite this body with its head. In so far as these active relations are actual in God, the Spirit is known as an identity of God who gives access to the Father in the freedom of the Son's love. In this way, Jenson's formal and general descriptions of the Spirit identify the Spirit as a

¹²⁰ *ST* I, 160.

¹²¹ *ST* II, 318-9; *ST* I, 160.

¹²² *ST* I, 160-1.

hypostatic being over and against the Father, the Son, and the church who is free to give himself in love as love. When appreciated in this sense Jenson's attempt to move beyond the *filioque* can be interpreted as a faithful extension of Basil's description of the mutual action of the Father, Son, and Spirit: 'God works...and the Son serves...and the Holy Spirit is also present of his own will, dispensing gifts.' Ironically, this happens as Jenson grasps and develops Augustine's bold assertion that the Spirit's gifts are nothing other than himself.

VI. Narrative, Narrative Causality and the Spirit of God

To this point I have summarized Jenson's description of the Spirit to highlight his use of Scripture, his critique and appropriation of the tradition and his differences from Barth. In and through this the novelty and oddity of Jenson's pneumatology was noted. In particular I have argued that Jenson rightly and deftly integrates the dependent aspect of the Spirit's personal particularity in to his trinitarian description. At this point it is essential to note and elucidate the connection of this to his attempt to appropriate the eschatological character of the biblical narrative. At the beginning of the chapter it was argued that the attempt to describe the person of the Spirit in essential connection with the promises of God is faithful to the development of the Old Testament narrative. In this context and in the New Testament the Spirit is known as the power of God in creation and resurrection and in recreation. Having described the significance of this content we will now turn to the formal character of the biblical narrative, which reveals this same truth.

Jenson's project is an attempt to identify God by the particular events of the biblical narrative and to incorporate the eschatological events narrated in scripture within this identification. A basic assumption of this enterprise is that the events narrated in scripture are events in God's life that constitute God's triune being as they are freely chosen by the three identities of God. As we have noted again and again and now again, the three identities of God are not behind and above these identifying events, but are identified by and with these events. God's eternal life, Jenson argues, is not constituted by his freedom from these events. Instead, is it constituted by freedom in and through these events. Recognizing the temporal actuality of this life and the nature of this freedom, Jenson construes this same divine life by the dynamics

of the biblical narrative that describes this life wherein God's future is not disconnected from his past or present.¹²³

Jenson is direct in justifying this attempt: he asserts that 'since the biblical God can truly be identified by narrative, his hypostatic being, his self-identity, is constituted in dramatic coherence.'¹²⁴ Jenson asserts that if God is identified by the biblical narrative as it properly describes his life, then the dynamics of this narrative reveal the shape that God chooses for his life. Again, Jenson implies that what is real in this life can really be narrated without necessarily distorting the triune God's eternity. The temporal aspect of narrative does not imply that scripture's description of God's personal actuality is an accommodation to our finite being. Jenson's description of the Spirit makes patent the assumption that there is a proper fitness between the nature of God's life and the nature of this narrated story. In sum, God's life, history, and the biblical narrative are driven forward by the actuality of God's promises; that the Spirit is bound up with this dynamic in a hypostatically appropriate way follows from the content and form of revelation.

Jenson cites and appropriates Aristotle's definition of dramatic coherence to specify the nature of this dynamic that is actual in God: he writes 'a good story is one in which events occur "unexpectedly but on account of each other," so that before each decisive event we cannot predict it, but afterward see it was just what had to happen.'¹²⁵ The synthesis in Christ and the church of two distinct eschatological visions that was traced above reveals this type of coherence in fulfillment. The resolution of another Old Testament antinomy makes Jenson's application of this observation clear. Jenson notes that in scripture "'that age" in which all the continuities of life are transformed and the "resurrection of the dead" are one reality.'¹²⁶ That Jesus was raised before this event's total occurrence 'is, to be sure, unexpected by previous versions of Israel's hope.' But in this occurrence Israel

¹²³ Daniel Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 71, makes the same point with absolute clarity; he explains that 'if the triune God is understood as a continuing history of compassionate and victorious love, it follows that we must not...think of the Trinity primarily in retrospect, looking backwards from God's dealings with the world to the Trinity before creation. We must also think of the Trinity prospectively, looking ahead to the glorious completion of the history of divine love.'

¹²⁴ See as well *ST I*, 108.

¹²⁵ *ST I*, 64.

¹²⁶ *ST I*, 85.

becomes a blessing to the nations and ‘a sort of hole opens in the event of the End, a space for something like what used to be history, for the church and its mission.’¹²⁷ Seen in retrospect this is just what had to happen for God’s faithfulness to be expressed to Israel, the nations, and for the person of the Spirit to be made known. Neither of these identity-revealing events could be predicted, but their interconnectedness and ‘necessity’ can be appreciated in retrospect. Seen from within the narrative, the interconnectedness of God’s acts reveals a mutuality that is as ‘necessary’ as the internal relations of the Father, Son, and Spirit. Reading the biblical narrative in this way, Jenson asserts that this one and only divine life is like a story or drama with twist and turns, conflict, tension, foreshadowing, and resolution. Like a good story, it is one that has space for continual life, for ongoing goodness and surprising newness. It is unique in that the character of the end is given before the actuality of this event.

Developing this logic Jenson suggests that

the order of a good story is an ordering by the out come of narrated events; its animating spirit – precisely here the word is unavoidable— is the power of a self determined future to liberate each specious present from mere predictabilities, from being the mere consequence of what has gone before, and open it to itself, to itself as what that present is precisely not yet.¹²⁸

In this quote several of our ‘key-word’ descriptions of the Spirit reappear to suggest that the dynamics of this story decisively shape Jenson’s description of the Spirit. The Spirit is the power of God as the self-determined transcendence of the Father that comes to the Father with the Son to open God to what he will be and so is. Likewise, this one who animates Christ’s life animates the life of Israel. Additionally and crucially, this person of God moves creation towards its perfection. The Spirit does this as the end that gathers the church in anticipation of what it will be in union with Christ. At the end of created history and so at the end of the biblical narrative is the Spirit, who as the Spirit of Christ and God makes all things new. In the nexus of these relations, the order of God’s life and created life is partly and truly ordered by its end, or by its Spirit. To confess that this Holy Spirit is one of the Trinity is, according to

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ *ST I*, 159.

Jenson, to confess without qualification that the content and form of the biblical narrative truly identify God.¹²⁹

Jenson goes further to suggest that this confession is equivocal with the confession that there is narrative causality in God – that what is real for God is determined by his beginning and his freely chosen end. Jenson asks the question: ‘is [God’s] life ordered by an outcome that is his outcome, and so in a freedom that is more than abstract aseity?’¹³⁰ The whole of Jenson’s identification of the Spirit asserts an affirmative response. Moreover, he claims that this is the gospel’s supposition. If the Spirit is the end and goal of all God’s ways and is active as this end in hypostatic or personal ways as an identity of God, then God’s mutual life is ordered and determined by its beginning and end. When the Spirit acts as the power of the Kingdom with the Father and the Son, then God’s freedom is more than the freedom of pre-temporal distance and abstract objectivity. God is *a se*, but he is so in his act that reveals his being in distinction from created beings. This act is the perfect mutual act of the Father, his Son Jesus Christ and their Spirit who enlivens the future of these two persons in distinction from and in perfect relation to these same two persons. In this way, there is unity and distinction between three identities who are each active in particular ways to mutually determine God’s life and being. Jenson’s description of this ordering that is actual in narratives, in the biblical narrative and also in God takes this mutuality and this freedom as the final truth about God’s eternity and self-determined existence.

Jenson notes that this answer concludes his temporal identification of God and the ‘final overcoming within the doctrine of the Trinity of pagan antiquity’s interpretation of being as persistence.’¹³¹ If the Spirit is the power of the Resurrection and the liveliness of all creation as the future of God and this person is God with the Father and the Son, then the triune God’s life is like a drama or a story. If the Father is one with the Son who is Jesus Christ and the Spirit is the power of the promised future, which is given a specific form in the life of Christ, then God’s being is in perfect anticipation of who he will be and so is. In the event of the Resurrection and in the church this end is known as the Spirit acts in time with the Father and the Son to be and reveal the one God’s gracious love and eternal being.

¹²⁹ ST I, 160.

¹³⁰ ST I, 160.

¹³¹ ST I, 159.

VII. An Anticipated Ending

Jenson, in a characteristic but surprising way, suggests that the ‘great occurrence of narrative causality in God is the Resurrection.’¹³² This one event occurs in the life of God as the revelation of the final outcome of his freely determined life. This event occurs before the resolution of creation’s history even as it determines the character of that same ending. As such an event, it reveals and determines the future even as it is an event of the past whose effects are actual in the present. In this chapter I have traced the ways in which Jenson grounds this description of the Spirit in the unique content and shape of this history. As noted, his characterization depends on an eschatological reading of the prophets that anticipates and is clarified by Jesus’ life. This one life is understood in the context of eschatological expectation even while the context itself is clarified by this person. This inter-dependent structure of promise and surprising fulfilment looks back to Jenson’s description of the Father and the Son and ahead to his theological ontology.

On the basis of this coherent structure Jenson challenges the traditions formal trinitarian propositions to assert that the Spirit is a hypostatic being. This one lives and acts with the Father and Son as a person of God. This one and the same Spirit is antecedent to and active in creating their communion. This role and the Spirit’s actuality is grounded in the relations revealed in scripture between the Spirit and Christ and between the Spirit and creation. Taking these relations as indicative of the truth of who God is in his eternal being, Jenson secures a place in God for the Spirit to stand over and against the Father and the Son as a partner in God’s eternal conversation. Just as the Father is the ‘Mon-arche,’ and the Son is God and also a creature, the Spirit is distinguished in the life of God as the perfecting power of God’s ways. The Spirit is breathed by the Father as the enlivening power of the future that he chooses to be and have for his Son and creation. From this ‘Archimedean standpoint’ Jenson suggests that the Spirit ‘moves the life he lives with the Father and the Son.’¹³³ Because of this standpoint in God as one identity of God, the Spirit of the Father can address the Father, the Son, and their community. Likewise, the Spirit can be addressed as God. In these dynamics and in these relations the Spirit known and

¹³² *ST I*, 163

¹³³ *ST I*, 156.

his role in the life of God appreciated. Not because the Spirit acts to reveal or glorify himself, but because the Spirit is with the Father and the Son active as one identity of the triune God.¹³⁴

Jenson's identification of God by and with contingent events pushes us to recognize and to confess that the Spirit is God as a dependent, but actual person of God. This is known in light of the Spirit's activity to unite the Church with the risen Lord in anticipation of our ultimate participation with Christ in the life of God. Just like the Son, this person of God acts and witnesses to the glory and honour of the Father. He does so as he frees Jesus to be the Son and the church to be with this same Son. As the hypostatically actual freedom of these relations, this identity of God exists in this event, as this event, and even as the one who actualizes the event of communion itself. In this mysterious way the Spirit is self-deferential even as he does what only he can do. Only the Spirit frees the Father and Son for each other; only the Spirit frees the church for union with Christ in worship to the Father. When Jenson's description is understood in this sense of mutual and self-deferring action, it is clear that the Spirit's coming is not described as a supplementary salvific event. It is an act of the triune God that reveals this person as an identity of God who with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified.¹³⁵

¹³⁴ Jenson's insight at this point is essential. However, this description of the Spirit as the future of God has a tendency to speak of the Spirit in slightly individualistic terms. When this happens Jenson's trinitarian description obscures the mutual aspect of all God's act; the effects of this are complex and crucial. We will return to this in the conclusion.

¹³⁵ George Hunsinger, 'Karl Barth's doctrine of the Holy Spirit,' in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth* ed. John Webster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 193 n. 6, suggests that 'Jenson requires a supplemental saving work of the Spirit, since he explicitly denies what Barth takes to be the very heart of the New Testament, namely, that "Christ fully accomplished our salvation at Golgotha (ST I, 179).'" In this critique Hunsinger relates Jenson's description of the Crucifixion and Resurrection to his description of the Spirit's work to found the church. On the one hand, Jenson sees distinction and relation, dependence and mutuality in these events and the person's made known in and through these events. On the other, Hunsinger thinks that the one event of the cross can stand alone as an accomplished and singularly determinative salvific event. Forcing Jenson's synchronic interpretation into diachronic logic, he necessarily interprets Jenson's description of the event of the Spirit's coming to found the Church as a secondary event of salvific importance. In neither case does Hunsinger's interpretation appreciate what Jenson is suggesting as the nature of two events related in dramatic coherence. Nor does Hunsinger seem to appreciate Jenson's description of the mutual action and being of the identities of God. As a result, his critique misses the mark and forces Jenson to say something he

is in fact not saying. In sum, Hunsinger abstracts Jenson's descriptions of the work and person of Christ and the Spirit from the coherent whole, just as he abstracts the cross from the unified work of God that the biblical narrative connects in essential relation.

Chapter 5

The Being and Freedom of the Triune God

I. Shifting Questions

To this point I have argued that Robert Jenson's identification of God makes a significant contribution to the tradition. This is the case because Jenson focuses directly on the persons of God as witnessed to in scripture. In doing so he appropriates the variety and oddity of this witness into trinitarian description. This in turn leads to revisionary descriptions of the Father's Monarchy, the Son's two natures, and the Spirit's hypostatic actuality. Beginning with the Resurrection, Jenson's trinitarian description follows from God's self-revelation. This *a posteriori* logic is guided by two things: first, the Old Testament's description of God's way of being; and, second, the neo-Nicene logic of persons in communion. The heart of this is Jenson's basic conviction that the persons are actual in their mutual history that is inseparable from Jesus Christ's life.

Jenson's description of Jesus, his Father, and their Spirit raises the question of how these three are divine. If it is not primarily by the perfect and identical possession of ontological plenitude before and without creation, how then are these three God? In answering this methodologically secondary question, Jenson tries to avoid abstracting from the persons as they are revealed while specifying their eternal everlastingness. To begin, Jenson turns to theological ontology with the qualification that it is a biblically unnecessary, but conceptually unavoidable question.¹ This question is unavoidable, according to Jenson, because of our mixed heritage. Because the church for which Jenson is writing is the Israel of God consisting of descendants of Plato there is a responsibility to explicate the logic of our confession to ourselves and our contemporaries. Because the questions 'Does your God have being?' or 'Is your God the ground of being?' have been and will be asked, we must have a ready answer. In addition, Jenson notes that the concept of being has played such a decisive role in the development of Christian theology that any situated and responsible theology must engage the notion. This concept has become an essential aspect of

¹ ST I, 207.

specifically Christian thinking and therefore must be recognized and appropriated.² The goal of such thinking is simple: to clarify the distinction between God and his creature using and reworking a foreign conceptuality by bending it to the reality of God's triunity.

Jenson's theological ontology makes three things patent:

1. that no concept of being should mitigate the personal nature of divinity that is constituted in the perfect mutuality of Jesus, his Father and their Spirit;³
2. that if the three previously identified as God are truly God then some idea of a successive eternity is necessary;
3. That the freedom of God is actual in his graciously chosen, anticipated, and actualized mutuality.

To explicate these conclusions it is necessary to do three things: first, note the classical frame that Jenson is chaffing against; second, contrast Jenson with another attempt to push the limits of orthodox thinking; and, third, note the standing critiques of his trinitarian ontology. At the heart of the matter is the question of God's freedom, being, and goodness.⁴

II. Relating the Incarnation and the Trinity: Two Classical Solutions

Jenson uses the Nicene confession as a guide and a guiding criterion for identifying God. No theologian is more naturally identified with Nicea's confession than Athanasius. Therefore, it is appropriate that we turn to this Alexandrian to look at the

² Ibid.

³ Jenson's attempt to construct a theological ontology in response to the self-revelation of these three persons is an explicit and intentional violation of the 'no persons rule.' Jenson, *The Triune Identity*, 176, explains that the entire tradition 'presumes that metaphysical knowledge is attained-if at all-by a mode of generalization that eliminates all such particular references.' He cites as an example Lessing's rule and offers a contrary assumption: 'that the particular historic reality of Jesus of Nazareth is the key function in the true metaphysical structure of reality.'

⁴ John Zizioulas, 'Truth and Communion' in *Being as Communion* (Crestwood NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985), 72-3, trenchantly identifies this question. After contrasting the 'Hebraic' and 'Hellenic' concepts of 'truth as history' and 'truth as being' with the notion that Jesus Christ, the second person of God, *is* the truth, Zizioulas asks 'How...can truth be considered simultaneously from the point of view of the "nature" of being (Greek preoccupation) from the view of the goal or end of history (preoccupation of the Jews), and from the viewpoint of Christ, who is both a historical person and the permanent ground (the Logos) of being (the Christian claim)- and all while preserving God's "otherness" in relation to creation?'

way he developed the basics of a theological ontology. This is doubly appropriate due to the fact that it has been argued in the contemporary context that Athanasius' thought makes a unique contribution to the integration of God's act and being.⁵ After discussing Athanasius and this suggestion we will look briefly at one of the ways that Athanasius' logic was developed in the tradition.

II.1 Athanasius and the Being of God

In his *Orations against the Arians*, Athanasius lays down an essential axiom for Christian theology: it is better to speak of God as Father and know him from and in the Son, than to speak of him as the unoriginate and identify him in relation to and distinction from his works.⁶ This is the case because the Son is proper to the being of God; the Son's source is the being of the Father. In contrast, the works of God are from nothing and so are not necessary or necessarily related to God. This distinction is summarized in the conclusion that Creation is from the will of God, while the perfect being or nature of God is determined by and only by the relation of the Father to his immutable word or Son.⁷ Athanasius consistently supports this contrast with the insistence that the Son is the one by whom and through whom God creates all things. He is not included in all things that come into being through God's willing, but is eternally the word and wisdom and glory of God.

Athanasius' logic has two critical implications relative to the Son. First, the Son is essential to the being of the Father. In other words, the Son is begotten of the Father as the word and wisdom and glory of the Father, who always has his glory, wisdom and word because he is perfectly good. Second, the Son's identity or metaphysical reality is determined by his relation to the Father without creation and so without the events of the Incarnation. This second implication is affirmed by the distinction between the Being of God and the acts of salvation. On the one hand the Being of God is eternal and necessary; on the other, the nature of creation and the acts of salvation that have a beginning in time are contingent. In distinction from created things, Athanasius insists that the Word, who reveals the Father, is the immutable

⁵ T.F. Torrance, 'Athanasius: A Study in the Foundations of Classical Theology' in *Theology in Reconciliation* (London: Macmillan Publishers, 1975) 215-266. Hereafter abbreviated *Theology in Reconciliation*, and page.

⁶ *Orations Against the Arians* I.34

⁷ *Orations Against the Arians* II.2.

Word that is perfectly good because he is from the substance of the Father.⁸

Athanasius' reading of Philippians 2 makes it clear that the Son is the same giving as the Word and receiving in the flesh. The Word is always and necessarily equal to the Father in his person as the Word and so is eternally exalted and eternally God. As a result, the humiliation and exaltation of Jesus Christ is conceived of as an external act of God. This exaltation is unnecessary for the Son who is always exalted with the Father. Likewise, the Word, regarded as the Word, does not die, is not raised, nor is he anointed for his own sake, but for ours.⁹ In sum, the Son, according to Athanasius, is one with the Father by nature; the Incarnation does not affect or effect this reality. The being of God is perfect and is therefore eternally determined without the willed acts of God.¹⁰

Athanasius' defence of the creed and the divinity of the Son clarifies several things about his theological ontology. These features are more implicit than explicit. First, the Son is proper to the being of God as the word and glory and power of the Father in a way that entails relationality in being.¹¹ Second, this being is eternal, immutable, and perfect without creation, which has a beginning in time, and without the Incarnation, which is for us and for our salvation. Finally, God's freedom to create and to become incarnate are necessarily connected to his metaphysical independence and ontological self-sufficiency. Again, all of this is clarified and summarized in Athanasius' distinction between the Son, who is proper to the perfect being of God, and the works of God, including Creation and the Incarnation that are contingent and unnecessary.

Despite the clarity of this distinction there remains an ambiguity or complexity to Athanasius' description of God. This is the case because Athanasius identifies the Son with the will of God. This ambiguity was noted by the Arians, who suggested that such a description implies a temporal distance and so an ontological distinction between the Father and the Son. This distance or difference would be similar to the distinction between the being of the Father and the willed acts of

⁸ *Orations Against the Arians* I.36.

⁹ See *Orations Against the Arians* I.41-48 for a surfeit of examples, which are summed up in the conclusion that 'when our lord Jesus Christ sojourned with us, we were improved, freed from sin, but he is the same. When he became man he was not mutated.' (I.48)

¹⁰ *Orations Against the Arians* I.62-4.

¹¹ John Zizioulas notes this in 'Truth and Communion' in *Being as Communion* (Crestwood NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985), 84.

creation.¹² Athanasius' answer to this objection consists of a repetition of his two basic affirmations and the further insistence that God has one will. If the Son came into being by God's will and then creates as his will, then this implies two wills: the one that begets the Son and the one that is the Son through whom all things are made. This reduction to absurdity shows, according to Athanasius, that 'God's will is not in the things which He brings into being, but in him through whom and in whom all things made are brought to be.'¹³ So, if the Word is the framer of all things and he co-exists with the Father, then he precedes creation and is the one through whom God wills and creates his works. What he is by nature transcends willing in an external sense because 'he is himself the Father's living counsel.'¹⁴

When Athanasius describes God's will as internal to his being, the distinction between his Being and Act is made more complicated. T.F. Torrance notes that this complexity is demonstrated in Athanasius' use of the term *henousios energeia*. According to Torrance this term suggests that 'the one activity of God [is] intrinsic to his Being.'¹⁵ This reading of Athanasius leads Torrance to suggest that the Incarnation is something that happens in the life of God. Although he recognizes that Athanasius maintains a strict conception of God's immutability, he suggests that 'God is so wonderfully and transcendently free in his own eternal Being that he can do something new without changing in his *ousia* and can go outside of himself in the Incarnation without ceasing to be what he is eternally in his own ineffable Being, for his *energia* inheres in his *ousia*.'¹⁶ Following this Torrance suggests that Athanasius 'thought into each other so consistently the doctrine of the Incarnation of the Son as the divine Logos...and the doctrine of God...that he advanced a doctrine of the saving *parousia* of God in the flesh which entailed the inseparable unity of the act and being of God in Jesus Christ.'¹⁷ This suggests that Athanasius reconceived the notion of being by insisting that the Logos *and his act* are internal to and determinative of God's being.¹⁸

¹² *Orations Against the Arians*, III.59.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ T.F. Torrance, *Trinitarian Perspectives* (Edinburgh; T&T Clark 1994), 84.

Hereafter abbreviated *Trinitarian Perspectives*.

¹⁶ *Theology in Reconciliation*, 224.

¹⁷ *Theology in Reconciliation*, 225.

¹⁸ *Trinitarian Perspectives*, 86.

While it is clear that Athanasius thinks of the Son as the will of God and asserts without qualification that the Son is proper to the being of God, it is not clear in *Orations Against the Arians* that Athanasius thinks that the works of God, such as the Incarnation, are internal to God's being.¹⁹ In this sense Torrance seems to confuse the distinction between the being of the Son, the working Son as the will of the Father, and the works of the Son in the Incarnation. The Son is the will of the Father and active as this one whose being is proper to the being of the Father. Moreover, in *Orations Against the Arians*, it is clear that the act of the Incarnation is dependent on the being of God, or, more precisely, on the presence of the Word. The energy or capacity to will and accomplish this act is unquestionably internal to God's *ousia*. However, it is also clear for Athanasius that this being is not effected by this condescension. In other words, the Son is internal to the being of God, but this act is not necessarily determinative of his personal actuality with the Father as the will of God. It is not internal in the sense that it constitutes his personal reality as the will and word of the Father.

Despite Torrance's suggested reading of *henousios energeia*, it seems relatively clear in *Orations Against the Arians* that the distinction between the Being and Act of God is maintained. This is done to distinguish the Son from creation and all things contingent. God's being is not complete without the Son who acts, but is complete without the acts, because the Son perfectly pre-exists as the Father's will without creation. Moreover, the active and external willing of the Son, according to Athanasius, does not affect his being *in se*. The one who is the will of God is internal to who God is, but, for Athanasius, this does not make his acts essential to his person or to God's being.

This critique does not necessarily dismiss Torrance's suggestion: that it is possible to think the concept of the logos, the Incarnation, and the doctrine of God together to the end of reconstructing the relation of God's being and act. Moreover, it is through a strict adherence to Athanasius' axiom that this can and must be done. As

¹⁹ Torrance makes this argument in *Trinitarian Perspectives* in relation to the term *henousios energia* and its importance in *Orations Against Arians*. For this reason I have directed my critique to this more limited reading of Athanasius. In his description of Athanasius in *Theology in Reconciliation* this argument is made in reference to all of Athanasius corpus and especially his reflection on the Spirit as evidenced in his Letters to Serapion. Due the limitations of this thesis, the centrality of the Orations in the tradition, and the specific question about the relation of the incarnation and the being of God this limitation is appropriate.

Athanasius argues, ‘the Father declares and the scriptures shout’ that the Son is begotten of the Father as the Word and wisdom and reflection of God. He is essential to who the Father is as God.²⁰ Likewise, the creed and scripture make it clear that it is Jesus Christ who is this Son and who with the Father is God. Appropriating this as a realistic description of the Son, it is essential to identify God principally by and with *this* Son. Clarifying how God is eternal in distinction from creation is a secondary question. Initially, it is essential to see that God’s being is not separate from his act for and with us, because the Son who reveals the Father is Jesus Christ. The Son’s life with and for us is a gracious act of condescension, but it is nevertheless a real coming and being in history that is real for God and determinative of the Son’s person. As a result, the logic and grammar of our description of God should match the object that freely and truly has his being before, in, and after created history. It is possible and necessary to describe the Son who is Jesus Christ before – and so without – creation. This one and the same is always the will of God. However, the way in which this is done must avoid the tendency to separate the will of God and the acts he graciously works for and with us that are internal to his person.

In retrospect it seems that there are two valid ways of developing Athanasius’ logic. On the one hand, it is possible to develop the strong distinction between the necessary being of God and God’s contingent acts to the end of arguing for the eternal existence of the Son; on the other hand, it seems possible to develop Athanasius’ suggestion that the Son is the will of God to the end of distinguishing the creator from his creatures. In this later option it is critical to focus on God’s acts that are possible through his saving *parousia*. Before we turn to Jenson’s attempt to develop this type of distinction in his theological ontology, we will look very briefly at one other classic attempt that develops the logic of the first possibility.

II.2 Thomas Aquinas and the Real Distinction

²⁰ *Orations Against the Arians*, I. 14.

In the *Summa Theologiae* Thomas Aquinas develops the first possibility arguing that God is eternal and that created beings are not.²¹ In this discussion Thomas uses the ‘real distinction’ that he developed in *On Being and Essence* to clarify the nature of created beings. Thomas argues that God is the one and only being in whom essence and existence are one or are mutually implicating since God is simple.²² In God his essence implies his existence, therefore he has and is Being. All other things have being as they are composite of form and material or are the actualization of a potential form.²³ In contrast, God is without the potential of becoming. In both texts, Thomas works out a theological ontology to clarify the distinction between God and creatures from this starting point: God is the one Being in whom essence and existence are mutually implicating; he is not a form that is actualized but the being that is *actus purus*.²⁴ While creatures are the actualization of potential in time, God is the simple being who is in eternity as a sheer act of existing. The obvious implication of this is that the Trinity is perfect and perfectly complete without the Incarnation.

Jenson suggests that Thomas develops the real distinction to trump Aristotle’s definition of being. In his metaphysics Aristotle develops the notion of *phusis* to connect all ‘separated entities’ to deity so that they, like the divine nature, have their cause and security of existence in themselves.²⁵ In contrast, Aquinas thinks faithfully in light of the doctrine of creation to clarify that God is the only necessary Being and so the one who guarantees the existence of all other beings.

After affirming Thomas’ distinction, Jenson notes the conclusions of this logic and its oddity; he writes, ‘God is his own essence. God is his own existence or being. Therefore his existence is his essence.’ He then asks the intriguing question ‘Does, then, his existence sheerly as such constitute his essence?’²⁶ If God is the pure act of existing that is simply his essence as God, is his pure act then his essence? For

²¹ *Summa Theologiae* I.3.2-4. Thomas’s ‘third way’, *Summa Theologiae* I.2.3, also uses the logic of necessary and possible beings to suggest that God is that which is and must be, while all other things are contingent beings

²² *On Being and Essence*, trans. Joseph Bobik (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1965), 46.

²³ *Ibid*; in addition see *On Being and Essence* 28, 30, and 45.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 47.

²⁵ For a brilliant and concise commentary on Aristotle’s notion of nature see Martin Heidegger, *Pathmarks*, ‘On the Essence and Concept of *Phusis* in Aristotle’s Physics B, I’ ed. William McNeill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 183-230; especially, 187-189.

²⁶ *ST I*, 213.

Thomas this reversal appears to be benign because God is He who is and so is the form that is no form. Likewise, God simply is and is so beyond description in himself. Dropping this final assumption Jenson tries to use Thomas' logic to the end of developing a theological ontology. This is done by accepting Thomas' description of God as the pure and necessary act of Being. This act is then specified as the Resurrection or the perfect mutual life of Jesus, his Father, and their Spirit. The end of this is the attempt to think the Trinity and Incarnation together or to appreciate the unity of God's act and being.

In this strange appropriation Jenson describes Thomas Aquinas as an essential model for constructing a theological ontology. Despite this Jenson resists Thomas' starting point. This resistance is a reaction to Thomas' basic assumption: 'that we know what it is for things in general to be, and must inquire, first, whether this concept of being can at all be used of God or is perhaps made merely equivocal in the attempt.'²⁷ In contrast to this, Jenson identifies the persons of God in response to God's self-communication, which he believes is grounded in God's personal presence with those to whom he reveals himself. Practically, Jenson's trinitarian description and theological ontology is a 'thinking after' God's action; his theology is therefore controlled by an *a posteriori* logic. This implies that we learn what 'Being' means by hearing about who God is as Father Son and Spirit.

This basic difference is captured in the preferred name of God that illustrates the character of each thinker's theological ontology. As was just noted Jenson prefers Father, Son, and Spirit, or, more precisely and practically, Jesus Christ, his Father, and their Spirit. Thomas suggests that the most proper name for God is 'He who is' because this name determines the least about God. Thomas suggests that 'He Who Is, is the principal of all names applied to God; for comprehending all in itself, it contains existence itself as an infinite and indeterminate sea of substance.'²⁸ In contrast with Jenson's preference and methodology, Thomas' conception of an undefined *actus purus* appears as an abstraction from God's revelation. More precisely, his preferred name suggests a move away from God's self-revelation in the Son to defining God by negative relation to his works. At this point, it appears that Athanasius' ontological distinction is detached from his basic axiom. In contrast to this, Jenson assumes that God's self-communication reveals who God is, what God is,

²⁷ *ST* II, 36-7, n.31.

²⁸ *Summa Theologiae*, I.13.1

and how God is.²⁹ With this directness Jenson moves beyond Thomas and a basic claim of orthodox trinitarianism that Thomas and Athanasius assume, namely, that God's being is determined in abstraction from action. The significance of this cannot be overstated.³⁰

III. A Constructive Alternative

This same methodological directness also leads Jenson beyond Gregory of Nyssa, whom he uses as the second model for constructing a trinitarian ontology.³¹ Jenson develops his positive reflection using Gregory as a guide and using some of Gregory's conclusions in creative ways. Jenson starts by describes Gregory's methodology: 'Gregory...specifies God's triune being by disassembling the notion of being onto the logic of God's triunity and so enabling the notion's application to God – or, at least, so we may in hindsight describe his procedure.'³² When Gregory thinks in this way he offers various answers to the question of why there are not three Gods if there are three hypostases of the same nature. The first is the one that we have noted and worked with, namely, that the three hypostases are actual in and through the joint possession of and constitution of the one divine nature. His second answer, according to Jenson, is that 'God' is not a term equivalent to the divine *ousia*.³³ As such, God is a predicate of the three agents whose single subjectivity is God. In this sense, the Father, Son, and Spirit are united in willing and acting while each instantiates and exemplifies the *ousia* of deity.

²⁹ The move to assert that we know God truly, while not totally, in his being is common in the contemporary context. See Karl Barth, *CD II/1*, 273 and Colin Gunton, *Act and Being* (London, SCM Press, 2002), 37-8.

³⁰ It is plausible, but possibly simplistic, to say that Jenson's theological ontology is a direct assault on substantialist ontologies. By this I mean any ontology that posits the existence of a thing or essence in an entity that perdures through time and is resistant to change. To define the nature of God as a substance implies that God's being is perfect and determined before any decisions, acts, or events.

³¹ For the emphasis on the unknowability of God's *ousia* in Gregory's thought see Sarah Coakley 'Persons' in the 'Social' Doctrine of the Trinity' in *The Trinity* edited by Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall SJ, and Gerald O'Collins SJ (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1999), 183. Jenson's step beyond Gregory is the drawing of consequences in Gregory's thought that the Cappadocian divine did not make; in this sense his engagement with Gregory is typical of the way that he uses other theologians insights and turns them to his own ends.

³² *ST I*, 214.

³³ *Ibid.*

To make this distinction clear and to illustrate the impact it has in Jenson's theological ontology, I will discuss the two terms, God and *ousia*, as they are used in relation to the idea of being (III.1). After this I will explicate the way that Jenson develops the notion of triune infinity (III.2), contrast this temporal infinity with Barth's notion of pure duration (III.3), and then finally describe the way this is developed and summarized (III.4-5).

III.1 Theological Actualism and the predicate God

According to Jenson and his reading of Gregory, 'God' 'refers to the mutual action of the identity's divine "energies," or to the perichoretic triune life. And since all divine action is the singular mutual work of Father, Son, and Spirit, there is only one such life and therefore only one subject of the predicate "God."'³⁴ There is one God because these three agents are perfectly and eternally unified in will and love and goodness. In this sense there is no thing 'divinity' that is previously described that we know as active in the persons. Instead, there is the unity of the three who are confessed to be the one God as they encounter humanity in perfect mutuality. Jenson explains that 'this being of God is not a something, however rarefied or immaterial, but a going-on, a sequentially palpable event, like a kiss or a train wreck.'³⁵ In this way Jenson describes the 'triunely personal perichoresis' or 'communal life' as a single happening.

In this happening the various acts of the one God are his being, beyond which there is no transcending to an otherwise divine subject.³⁶ This theological actualism is brought out in Jenson's more abstract description of God as an event where 'history occurs not only in him but as his being.'³⁷ Jenson, following Peter Brunner and Karl Barth, suggests that God is a history, a life, and an event, which primally happens to the triune persons and graciously includes us or creates the space for our history.³⁸ This notion leads Jenson to his fundamental statement about God: 'God is what

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ *ST I*, 214.

³⁶ Within Gregory's 'second answer' the term God is nearly equivocal to the use of *ousia* in his first answer. This noted, I will proceed to discuss God and *ousia* as synonyms in this immediate context where the focus is on act of God this is his being.

³⁷ *ST I*, 221.

³⁸ Note on decision that moves happening to act.

happens between Jesus and his Father in their Spirit.³⁹ In this fundamental statement the action of the three previously identified and distinct persons is described as the act and so the being of God.

Here again the Cappadocian rule is in view. If it is possible to speak of any single action and all of God's action having its origin in the Father its actuality in the Son, and its perfection in the Spirit and it is plausible that the persons have their existence in their action, then the unity of God's being can be conceived as the unity of the person's mutual action. Jenson notes the oddity of this suggestion and its obvious implication: 'that an event happens to something does not entail that this something must be metaphysically or temporally prior to it.'⁴⁰ By describing the communion of the persons as the perichoresis of their action, Jenson makes radical the most common assumption of theological actualism: that God's being is his act and his act his being.

This radical development is, of course, in tension with Athanasius' understanding of both the being of God and the persons of God, who as divine must have their essential ontological facticity prior to their activity. Why does Jenson make this assertion? First, his notion of revelation, which denies any ontological gap between God's act and his personal actuality, leads him in this direction. Second, his prior description of the persons, each of whom is known in time as an agent in relation to Israel and the church, assumes that God's action and relation to his creatures are not merely extrinsic to his being. More generally, Jenson's notion of election implies that God's being is in anticipation; who God is essentially is determined by his choice and the action that is inseparable from that choice. These basic notions are consistently paired with the apophatic proviso that 'it might not have been so' and the limited affirmation that 'God might have been the God he is without this world to happen to.'⁴¹

Jenson most clearly states the matter in relation to Christology where he concludes that 'about how God could as the same God have been other than *Jesus* the Son and *his* Father, and *their* Spirit, or about what that would have been like, we can know or guess nothing whatsoever.'⁴² In each case the counter-factual possibility of

³⁹ *ST* I, 221.

⁴⁰ *ST* I, 221.

⁴¹ See, for example, *ST* I, 221.

⁴² *ST* I, 141.

God's triune existence as Jesus, his Father, and their Spirit *without* creation is recognized as necessary, but irrelevant to positive and so faithful identification and description of the triune God. Jenson presents this logic as simply basic to the faith that is given by the triune God who is with and for us in his self-communication. The Father, Son, and Spirit introduce themselves to their people as God; it is better to identify God in response to this than describe his perfection and freedom in distinction from the contingency of creation. At this point, this directness is paired with his revisionary apophatism. This apophatism is captured in his conclusion that 'what created minds cannot accomplish is to predict the way of God's life were it not what it is – indeed, we cannot even know if God himself could make that prediction.'⁴³ In other words, God's life is what the persons of God eternally choose and enact. Their mutual action reveals this choice, both of which are internal to their hypostatic actuality.

When Jenson makes this move to suggest that the being of God is the unity of the three person's mutual action, it might appear that the persons are dissolved into their action or into a life that is other and more than the person's community. Jenson tries to fight this appearance with his second description of God's triunely personal perichoresis. He suggests that it is the Father, Son, and Spirit who live this life, who have a hypostatic being 'that must be distinguished from his act of being, as the antecedence of those who *do* the act.'⁴⁴ Jenson does not make this distinction by suggesting a temporal or metaphysical antecedence that corresponds to a prior eternal reality that is separate from their action in creation. Instead, he seems to suggest a logical possibility of describing each person in a way that is other than and prior to the reality that God is. This recognition is what we have consistently referred to as Jenson's focus on the hypostatic being of God. In this the personal distinctiveness and particularity of the Father, Son, and Spirit is logically other than the being of the one God.

It is essential to remember that Jenson's theological ontology assumes the identification of the persons by and with the narrative of scripture. In this narrative and the action it narrates it is possible to know and describe the persons in their hypostatic particularity. Jenson's suggestion implies that the being of God is not prior to or other than the personal actuality of the Father, Son, and Spirit as they act with

⁴³ ST I, 142.

⁴⁴ ST I, 215.

and for Israel and the Church. These persons really and truly encounter us in gracious relation, which assumes their unity and mutual relation, but does not depend on there being an antecedent substance called deity. This clarification, that the persons are antecedent to the Being of God, is simply the recognition that these three encounter us as they are God, as they constitute their being in themselves while acting for us. In this context the emphasis is on God's identification by, not just with, his acts. God's acts for us are inseparable from who he chooses to be and is. Nevertheless, it is possible to distinguish the persons from the totality of the single act that is God.

Again, Jenson's more conceptual description of God's being makes this point both clearer and more mysterious. Having described God as an event, Jenson tries to make it clear that 'God must, to be sure, be somehow a continuing subject of his acts.'⁴⁵ Jenson notes the temptation of describing God as a perduring subject and suggests that the way forward is to think of God's triunity and God as a person. These two things meet in the conclusion that a person is one event and many events.⁴⁶ God could therefore be described as the event of the Father's antecedent choosing, the Son's choice in Gethsemane or the Spirit's choice of descending and remaining on Jesus. Similarly, God could be described as the one choice to be God for us and to be God with us. In either case there are various acts and various events that presuppose two things, the reality of the Father, Son, and Spirit and their perfect unity of will and love and faithfulness. This faithfulness or characteristic consistency is what marks the person's acts; he explains 'as triune, he is truly faithful to himself, so that all his acts cohere to make the one act that he personally is.'⁴⁷ The reality of the Trinity is necessarily bound up with the way that the persons are distinct in their hypostatic particularity and inseparable from their being in act.

This does not mean that there is a prior one-ness and an eventful three-ness that must be dialectically balanced; in Jenson's theological ontology the oneness of God is actual in and through the unity and mutuality of God's perichoresis. In this sublime unity the three are as they act in a singularly perfect faithfulness. Consequently, the being of God is not other than the unity of the persons that is actual in love and faithfulness. Where does this leave us? It leaves us with a host of questions:

⁴⁵ *ST I*, 222.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

1. How are Jesus, his Father, and their Spirit free if the ontological actuality of God is determined in mutual action for God's people?
2. How, if God is freely identified by and with his acts in creation, is he not dependent on and practically determined by the actual conditions that are necessary for his personal being to be realized *as it is* in the dramatic overcoming of sin, death and the devil?
3. How do we describe more specifically the uniqueness of the persons, which is revealed in and constituted by their mutual action and so definitive of their hypostatic being and their communal life?

Jenson turns directly to the last question, when he recognizes that 'there must be what we may call *deity*, by instantiation of which Father, Son, and Spirit live God and not something else.'⁴⁸

III.2 Triune Infinity

Jenson follows Gregory of Nyssa to develop this distinctive characteristic of deity. This happens as Jenson uses certain possibilities that Gregory entertains to describe God's divine "nature" or *ousia*. According to Jenson, it is clear for Gregory what God's *ousia* or infinity is not: it is not 'an otherwise specified or specifiable divine *ousia*' that 'is also infinite;' it is not '*something* other than its own infinity, for were it something, it would just thereby be marked off from other things and would have a boundary.'⁴⁹ The conclusion that 'Deity that is infinity and nothing else can only be infinity-as-such' seems to follow.⁵⁰ What fits this, according to Jenson, is 'the infinity of what "God" picks out, the mutual action of the Father, Son, and Spirit.'⁵¹

This specific infinity is what the Father, Son and Spirit give to each other to be joint possessors of deity or what they decide and do to be the one God. In either case this reality that is given and achieved is specifiable as love. Again, this love is not other than the reality of the persons or God's being. This type of conceptual move appears to depend on the equivocation between person and event in God that was just described. If the persons of God in their action *are* God, then it is possible to describe

⁴⁸ *ST I*, 215.

⁴⁹ *ST I*, 215.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

the persons, the being, and the infinity of God's action and communion as love. Jenson makes the point clearly and exactly; he suggests that 'the Father's love can embrace whatever the Spirit's coming brings; the Son's love can endure whatever his Father sends him to do; the Spirit's creativity of love is inexhaustible.'⁵² In this perfect relation the Father, Son, and Spirit are persons and the one God as the reality of love that is infinite. The infinity of this love is perfection of the persons that entails their sovereignty over all things. Jenson explains it in this way: 'what happens among them accepts no boundaries; nothing can hinder what they enact.'⁵³ The one God is the Lord and sovereign other, the "I" that is without peer and so the single subjectivity that rules over all things and overcomes all things as an infinite communion and as infinite love. That Jesus, his Father and the Spirit are God means that they do this together as God and that each person is specifically describable as a possessor of the same *ousia* or limitless loving character. What the persons are for and with each other in their action is marked by mutual faithfulness and love. This love is beyond limitation as the triumphant love of the God who raised Jesus from the dead.

Jenson's description of the triune God's infinite loving communion clarifies the logic of his theological ontology. First, Jenson describes the persons in response to God's self-communication. When he shifts to clarify this conceptually he argues that the persons' actuality is the being of God. Within this Jenson suggests that the Father, Son, and Spirit's personal particularity is logically prior to this being as these three act and so are God. Assuming this, Jenson focuses on the persons and their action as a means of clarifying the characteristic nature of that action. The result is a conception of the persons and their perichoresis as love that is infinitely powerful. This love that encounters us and includes us is not therefore the negation of created actuality. It is instead the personal particularity and the personality of the one God noted in its unlimited liveliness. What is most peculiar about this infinite love is that it can include created otherness without becoming dependent on this other. This is the case because the persons of God, the being of God, and the love of God are without comparison and without limit as true love. This love can create space for creatures and live in relation to them without distancing them from true being. This is the case because this love is actual in the action that is beyond created imagining in its

⁵² ST I, 220.

⁵³ ST I, 216.

greatness and yet freely given to creatures in the Son, who is God and a creature. In this double movement the love and being of God is beyond comparison with created reality and in relation to created others through the Son. Because God is triune there can be extrinsic relation that has a place in this love without collapsing the structure of God's being. The significance of this is two-fold: first, Jenson's notion of infinity of the triune God appears to follow from the prior identification of God by and with Jesus; second, God's acts, being and ecstatic love is placed at the centre of his theological ontology.

Jenson notes that this conception of infinity is similar to Wolfart Pannenberg's discussion of love and the infinite nature of God.⁵⁴ Pannenberg's central and critical point is the true infinite that is known in God's holiness, eternity, omnipotence and love stands over and against the finite and fallen, but also transcends this contrast. God is the not-finite, but is more than this in his triune life as he includes the finite creature in his infinitely loving being. In a similar way Jenson explains that 'the false infinite is that defined merely by negation of the finite, that is not-finite and so after all bounded by the finite, and so itself after all bounded, that is, finite. To be true, infinity must embrace also the finite. Love is precisely the infinite embrace of the finite.'⁵⁵ According to both Jenson and Pannenberg, this vision of the true infinite is given in the knowledge of the triune life and its reality as love.⁵⁶ Beginning with the Son and thinking of God's being that is revealed in and determined by him, it is clear that the triune God freely creates and freely has his identity in relation to and distinction from creaturely reality. This is clarified explicitly by Pannenberg with reference to God's eschatological actuality in which the triune God is all in all.⁵⁷ He suggests that 'only then do we fully know God as the true Infinite who is not merely

⁵⁴ *ST* I, 218, 220.

⁵⁵ *ST* I, 220, n. 64.

⁵⁶ Wolfart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology* vol. I trans. Geoffrey Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 440-8. Hereafter abbreviated Pannenberg, *ST* volume, and page.

⁵⁷ If the persons are in a sense finite and yet infinite in their love and their unbounded liveliness do they as a perfect communion of love and faithfulness constitute a true infinity? David Bentley Hart's answer is an emphatic 'no;' he argues in *The Beauty of the Infinite* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 163, that any construct of a subjectivity that finds itself in a finite object is a false and merely circular infinite. So if the Father finds himself in the finite object Jesus, then his reality as God is limited by the being of a being or by the reality of the human person, regardless of the action of the Spirit.

opposed by the world of the finite, and thus himself finite.’⁵⁸ Here again, we see the effect of taking the eschatological description of scripture as witness to God’s being as a revelation of his freely chosen and perfectly anticipated actuality.

Jenson’s description of God’s infinity is tethered to the life and love of Jesus Christ. Because he identifies God by and with this life Jenson necessarily describes God’s act and being as a temporal infinity. To do this Jenson again follows certain possibilities entertained by Gregory. God’s temporal infinity, as it appears in Gregory’s description of God and in Jenson’s use of Gregory, is characterized by two things: it is supreme and supremely powerful. This supremacy is revealed by God’s transcendence of any finite metric that would or could place God in a series or in a class to be measured. Jenson explains that ‘God is not infinite because he extends indefinitely but because no temporal activity can keep up with the activity that he is.’⁵⁹ God is supremely speedy, but God is also supremely powerful in that ‘Gregory’s God is infinite because he overcomes all boundaries.’⁶⁰ In the unity of this transcendence and omnipotence God is active as the unbounded life of the three previously identified and described persons.

When Jenson develops this with reference to temporality it implies that there are distinctions in God’s infinite life between past, present and future that are real, but not really limiting. The same must be said of the persons that perfect that love and have their perfect communion in love. One quote of Gregory’s illustrates this temporal transcendence most directly for Jenson: ‘He is king before all ages and will rule through all ages...; he is infinite over the past and infinite over the future.’⁶¹ Whether Gregory intends to prioritize the future, as Jenson argues, or whether this possibility is a rhetorical conceit, is in this basic sense irrelevant.⁶² This is the case because Gregory describes God as the one who is not limited by beginning and end; Gregory’s God is understood as the infinitude, continuity and everlastingness of

⁵⁸ Pannenberg, *ST I*, 447.

⁵⁹ *ST I*, 216.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius*, 1:666-672. See NPNF vol. 5, 98.

⁶² Paul Molnar, *Divine Freedom and the Doctrine of the Immanent Trinity*, (Edinburgh, T&T Clark: 2002) 78, rightly notes that Jenson’s seems to overlook one aspect of Gregory’s rhetoric, that the priority of the future occurs in a conceit offered as to children in the marketplace. However, this mistake, does not obviate all of Jenson’s dependence on and use of Gregory. Moreover, it in no sense implies that Jenson’s conception of eternity includes limitations on God due to having beginnings.

deity.⁶³ Holding both these negations and this continuity and everlastingness together it is possible to argue that Gregory's conception of infinity is both a temporal infinity and a transcendence of temporal limitations.⁶⁴ If both of these conditions are met, then Jenson is not foolish to use Gregory as a guide for developing a description of infinity appropriate to the one God's eternity.⁶⁵

Regardless, the point that God's love and action is God's being, which each person perfectly actualises and exhibits, seems well argued by Jenson, whether he can depend on Gregory's authority or not. The question is not one to be decided by a judgement of Jenson as a historical theologian, but as a systematic thinker. More pointedly, the question of God's infinite freedom and transcendent love can and must be determined in relation to Scripture's witness and the creed's substance. Moving from scriptures description of the persons of God Jenson attempts to describe an eternity appropriate to the gospel's God. Jesus, his Father, and their Spirit are God. They are freely and truly identified by and with time and the transcendence of death. Regardless of what might have been, or what the logic of perfect being entails, these three live the one life that is divine.

III.3 Triune Eternity

Jenson critically appropriates several of Karl Barth's basic notions to describe the eternity of the biblical God. Jenson notes that Barth describes the eternity of God as a pure duration that is not equivalent to timelessness.⁶⁶ He explains that for Barth the purity of God's eternal temporality is actual in that nothing escapes God or is distant

⁶³ *Against Eunomius*, NPNF, 98.

⁶⁴ David Bentley Hart ultimately rejects Jenson's reading on this point; he argues that Gregory's conception of eternity and infinity is without extension or succession. (193) He explains that 'while Gregory succeeded better than his predecessors in describing divine eternity in terms of a fullness that all ages can not exhaust, this remains coherent only because of the absolutely inviolable analogical distinction he draws between time and the trinitarian eternity that makes time possible. He is quite severe to those who would introduce intervals of time into the divine nature.' In support of his position he note D.L. Balas, 'Eternity and Time in Gregory of Nyssa's *Contra Eunomium*,' in *Gregor von Nyssa und die Philosophie*, ed. H Doerrie, Attneburger, and U. Schramm (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1976) 146-7.

⁶⁵ In support of this reading of Gregory see Ekkehard Muehlenberg, *Die Unendlichkeit Gottes bei Gregor von Nyssa* (Goettingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1966)

⁶⁶ *CD II/1*, 617.

from God. He then asserts that this is the case for Barth's God because 'between source, movement, and goal there is no conflict but only peace.'⁶⁷ Barth relates this eternal temporality to the time of Jesus Christ and develops this in a positive and negative sense. Seen in the positive sense God's eternity is the perfect unity of past, present and future where these are distinctions for God without rift, fault, separation or fluctuation.⁶⁸ God gives time and can create time because in himself he is time as the *interminabilis vitae*. Seen in its negative sense God's eternity is timeless as it lacks the separation of past and future and the fleeting nature of created presence.⁶⁹ In the dialectical unity of these truths God surrounds and rules our time, according to Barth, because he is supratemporal.⁷⁰ He illustrates this supratemporality or God's simultaneity in eternity with the picture of the pole star that is in heaven as the still point of a moving harmony.

It is at this exact point that Barth remains within an Augustinian framework of 'conceptual unitarianism' and so appears to modulate the temporality of God's eternity. This happens as a strong preference for an atemporal definition of God's eternity seems to control the dialectic. This is indicated when Barth approves and uses Boethius' definition of God's eternity as the *nunc stans*. This remains the case even as Barth offsets this assertion with the recognition that God *lives* eternally.⁷¹ Despite this moment of dialectical balance, the time God takes into himself for our salvation does not remain time or a duration when viewed in its eternal aspect.⁷²

⁶⁷ ST I, 217.

⁶⁸ CD II/1, 612.

⁶⁹ CD II/1, 617. At this point it seems that Barth accepts without hesitation Augustine's account of subjective temporality. From this point where the present is an elusive and empty negative point the positive nature of God's present, understood as *nunc stans*, could be read as projection from the negative experience of human temporality. This is, of course, to overlook Barth's use of the Old Testament and his more robust account of God's liveliness. Despite these balancing moments there is a nagging sense that Barth's focus on the present as pure duration, where purity is equated with a lack of difference, overlooks the way that God takes up and redeems created temporality through Jesus Christ's *life*.

⁷⁰ CD II/1, 613-4.

⁷¹ CD II/1, 640.

⁷² Colin Gunton, *Being and Becoming* (London: SCM Press, 2001), 180, concludes that 'Barth's statement as a whole is unclear, if not patently ambiguous.' He continues and suggests that 'at time Barth defines eternity in light of (temporal) revelation, while at others he opposes it to time.' He concludes, 181, that 'the root of the ambiguity would then seem to be a persistent tendency...to contaminate the temporality of revelation with a conception of revelation as a timeless theophany.'

Because each aspect of temporality is reduced to identical presentness there is in fact no duration that corresponds to the reality of Jesus Christ's life, much less his life, death and resurrection. In sum, the purity of God's eternity, understood by Barth as an essential symmetry or simultaneity, threatens to leech the duration from the time that God is in himself and for us. As a result, God appears as the still and fixed point in a moving universe and not as a lively history freely determined in Christ's life.

In contrast, Jenson suggests that God is a pure duration because ““source” and “goal” are present and *asymmetrical* in him, because he is primally future to himself and only thereupon past and present for himself.”⁷³ Both the initial insight in this suggestion and its specification need to be analyzed. Jenson's insightful critique in its basic form is similar to the recurring critique of the Augustinian logic that necessitates identity between the persons of the Trinity. At this point, Barth's notion that God's eternity is the threefold repetition of presentness in symmetry is critiqued since it overlooks the difference between past, present and future as real difference, as a real movement or duration. Over and against this suggestion, Jenson argues that God is eternal in his temporal perfection, which has a real duration that includes distinction, difference and movement. God's liveliness is at heart his ecstatic self-movement outward that is temporal and ultimately provides the external metric of created temporality.⁷⁴ The triune life is the perfect mutual relation of the Father, Jesus the Son – who lives, moves, dies and is resurrected – and the Spirit. This life is a perfect asymmetric relation where there are sincere differences and perfect temporal duration.

This insight is developed as Jenson demonstrates his preference for the future; he explains that as God ‘creatively opens to what he will be...he gives and receives’ and so ‘perfectly anticipates’ who he will be and so is.⁷⁵ Here the actuality of God's futurity to himself creates a difference in God between past and future that is real in God's time, in God's infinite life, and so in God's being. This temporal dynamism in God's life is, according to Jenson, constrained by a difference between God's past and future, which is congruent with the distinction between the Father and the Spirit.⁷⁶

⁷³ ST I, 217.

⁷⁴ ST II, 31-35.

⁷⁵ ST I, 217.

⁷⁶ ST I, 218.

Jenson turns immediately to an Old Testament framework to place this description of God's eternity within his basic identification of God. To do so he focuses on the two categories that we have consistently noted in their decisive importance, namely, promise and faithfulness. The one God who speaks to Israel is the one whose Word endures forever in faithfulness and steadfast love. In other words, this God's Word makes and completes the covenant in which God is God. In this loving self-giving God is faithful to himself and to Israel and the church and so creates and sustains creation as a history. In this sense, the promises of God are history generating.⁷⁷ The extremity of God's faithfulness is revealed in the history that Jesus enters and the history he lives. This leads Jenson to conclude with the assertion that 'Israel's God is eternal in that he is faithful to the death, and then yet faithful again.'⁷⁸

In this exceedingly dense passage Jenson's prior identification of God's way in creation as commitment through promise and faithfulness is determinative. This way, as revealed in God's Word, grounds the suggestion that created time is actual by God's self-commitment. In addition, this action invades and recapitulates the brokenness of created temporality as God accepts and overcomes its limitations. This commitment is actual in the giving of Torah. It is also actual in Christ's self-giving and in the giving of new life to this one who died cursed by the law. In this way, Jenson seeks to ground the history of God in the history of his promises, which open up the possibility of life for Israel and so for all creation.

III.4 The Infinity of the God of Resurrection

Jenson's initial response to Barth demonstrates the way in which his definition of eternity and deity are connected. He notes this before engaging with Barth's notion of pure duration. He then continues and tries to make his definition of eternity more plastic and explicit while making it more trinitarian. This happens when Jenson does two things: first, he takes up Joachim de Fiore's mapping of the persons on to the poles of time; second, he interprets the Resurrection in light of this mapping. At the heart of this latter clarification is the affirmation that we have noted several times:

⁷⁷ *ST I*, 15; *ST II*, 13.

⁷⁸ *ST I*, 217.

that the events of Jesus' death and resurrection reveal and determine the way God is eternal.⁷⁹

Jenson's description of the eternity of God begins with the Spirit, whom he suggests is God coming to us from the 'last future' as the Spirit of Christ. As such, the Spirit is determined in its particularity by and with Jesus and his life and the definite shape given through the crucifixion and resurrection. This means that the Spirit will come in the end as the power of God's chosen *telos* given a specific content in time. When Jenson situates this insight in his conceptual scheme of the three poles of time he suggests that this coming will be to the Father as the source of time. In this pure duration the end and goal of God's time will be inseparably united and reconciled in the person of the Son, God's present. In this last construction the Son appears in the middle of two distinct and fully actual persons. In one sense this is correct, the Father and the Spirit are fully hypostatic beings. In another sense this is confusing as it modulates an essential insight into the nature of the Spirit's *hypostasis*, which is always a dependent *hypostasis*. This also seems to blur the insight just noted, that the events of Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection determine this future. In Jenson's words the Spirit is a *hypostasis* that finds its I and focus of consciousness outside itself and so in this context in the Son. Under the pressure of Jenson's adopted scheme this identification of the Spirit as the Spirit of Christ appears to be modulated. This happens as the three poles must be distinct to form a temporal duration. As a result, the Spirit becomes a future that is distinct from the Son and the Father, who are consigned to the present and past of God. At the least, this ambiguity points to a problem that we will return to.

In Jenson's scheme the Son is and will be the bond of unity between the Father and the Spirit as the mediator of eternity. Through this one person the created past, present and future are a pure and holy duration as he comes from the Father and goes to the Father through the Spirit. In this Jesus lives in God's love and as God's love; he is the perfect expression of the Father who is one with the Father as God. This objectivity of love is for Jenson the critical distinction of Christian hope that is revealed and determined in the Resurrection. Because Jesus was and is the man for others there is room in his future as it is the expression of perfect love intended by the

⁷⁹ This insight remains critical and essential, even if the way that Jenson goes on to fill this out leads to certain problems. In the next chapter I will note some of these problems and make suggestive corrections.

Father and perfected by the Spirit. Jenson explains that the 'eternity that rhymes every past and every penultimate future into present meaning, is the utter freedom of a community constituted by Jesus' crucified and therefore in exhaustible love.'⁸⁰ In other words, the eternity of God is freely and actually determined in created time as the Son lives a life of perfect obedience to the Father, the ultimate character of which is determined in his crucifixion. This perfection of faithfulness is revealed in the Resurrection and is, according to Jenson, determined to be God's present that mediates his past and future. Whether this scheme limits Jesus to the present of God's eternity is another question that must be addressed later.

Finally, in this context, Jenson describes the Father as the past of God or as the origin of God's eternity. This reality as the source of all love is, according to Jenson, the expression of his loving consciousness that intends himself and all things in the way he intends the Son. This is the last step that Jenson makes and so he concludes that 'divine infinity is...the infinity of this intention, that is, of a specific loving consciousness.'⁸¹ As was elucidated earlier, this single consciousness is for Jenson the personality of God who is the one God with and in the Son and Spirit. The mystery of God's existence as the community of three persons has its beginning in this basic truth, that God is the Father of this Son who is raised in the Spirit to be the end of all things. The eternity of God is the actuality of the prior choice to have this Son and the completion of this choice as it is perfected in the Spirit. This description of the Father, when placed in the Past-Present-Future scheme, begs the question of the way the Father intends the future of the Son. Specifically, Is the Father the Omega with the Son and his community? If the Father is only the source or past of God's infinite communion Jenson's insight into the double identity of the Father is obscured since the reality of the Father's presence in and *with* Son is modulated. If this is the case then the eternity of God is confused as the mutuality of the persons is obfuscated. Again, we will return to this later.

III.5 A Concluding Word

Within Jenson's description of God this modalist appropriation ironically leads to tritheistic temptation. Moreover, if the persons are described as the past, present and

⁸⁰ ST I, 217.

⁸¹ ST I, 220.

future of God their eternity appears to be at odds with their mutual life in created history. Despite these conceptual problems, Jenson's theological ontology moves in the right direction to describe the being of God in response to the ecstatic communion of the persons of God. This is captured in the affirmation that God is a history that transcends created history, but does so as the persons of God enter into and enable this history. In this the being of God is his act in which the persons are many acts and one single act as they are God. This is the major strength of Jenson's triune ontology. In effect, Jenson brings together the will, action, and being of God by thinking of all things in light of Jesus Christ's life, and his eternity as it is actual through the Resurrection. This makes it clear that the life of God in eternity is not determined by his independence, but by the life he chooses and lives before, in and after created history.

Jenson's theological ontology is complex and at points confused. Despite this confusion it is enlightening. It is so because Jenson focuses on the love and faithfulness of God that God is. As was just noted, Jenson is particularly clear on this when he begins with Jesus, his life as the one Son, and the end and renewal of that life in the Resurrection. In this way Jenson grasps Barth's essential insight that God's eternity is more than timelessness. Moreover, he develops this insight with Barth's christological axiom more radically and directly than Barth did himself. As a result, Jenson fully explores or exploits the ambiguity that was noted in Athanasius' theological ontology. In other words, Jenson thinks of Jesus Christ as the word or as the one Son willed or spoken by the Father, who with the Father determines God's being. This connection of God's Being with his Word is brought out in Jenson's fourth abstract description of God. According to Jenson, God is a conversation where the Speaker and the Spoken Word are united in address and response that is enlivened by the Spirit.⁸² Jenson argues that such person constituting address is the possibility of personhood. He also suggests that it is the possibility of historical being. Beyond this he asserts that the address and response of Jesus and his Father are the actuality of the being of God. In this sense the one act that is God's being is the speaking of the Word and the response of the Word to the Father in the Spirit.

Herein Jenson overtly plays with Barth's affirmation that God's being to his furthest depths is eventful. This happens as Jenson repeats with varying emphasis the

⁸² *ST* I, 223.

notion that God is a conversation. He writes ‘the Word is both spoken by and to God, and is the God who speaks and hears.’⁸³ Again, he explains that ‘the Son is God’s word to us and himself and is not impersonal but personal, so that he is speech just in that he is a speaker.’⁸⁴ Jenson continues in this line of description to describe the Father as the primal speaker and the Spirit as the enlivening presence and power of the Word. In effect, this summarizes Jenson’s attempt to describe the persons in their particular roles within the triune life where there is the most radical difference and the most perfect unity.

This conceptual summary is intriguing. It is intriguing because it resists any abstraction from the event of the triune God’s self-communication that is the incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection of the Son of Mary. It is also intriguing as it opens up various ways of speaking of our place in God. Jenson suggests that this conversation as God’s being is open to participation in which we know what it means to be and what it means to be good, true and beautiful.⁸⁵ The chief proposition to be affirmed then is that ‘God is truth and goodness and beauty because and only because knowledge and love and enjoyment in fact occur in the triune life.’⁸⁶ The key word in this is ‘occur;’ a more specific rendering would be *occur as the triune life*. This insistence on actuality is made clear when Jenson suggests that ‘we know God in that the Word of God that God is, that is *homoousios* with the Father, is actual only as conversation with us.’⁸⁷ This insistence on actuality is made obvious is an extended quote that should be included in full;

What must be emphasized is that the discourse that is God’s life is not in fact another discourse than that between Jesus and his Father in their Spirit, in which we join. That God is an object and so a partner of true free interchange is a fact not only of our converse with him but of the converse that he is; and it is the one in that it is the other...It is the truth of our knowledge of God: God gives himself to be our object, and the object that he gives to us is none other than the object as which he is given to himself. God says at once to himself and to us: who I am is the Father of that man Jesus. Because he says it first to himself it is true when he says it to us.⁸⁸

This quote in general and the last sentence in particular encapsulate the creativity and the difficulty of Jenson’s theological ontology. The actuality of God’s speech in

⁸³ *ST I*, 223.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ *ST I*, 225 ff.

⁸⁶ *ST I*, 226.

⁸⁷ *ST I*, 228.

⁸⁸ *ST I*, 229.

Jesus that is spoken to himself and to us and to us because it is primally spoken to himself is hard to grasp and harder still to explain. Despite this it seems that Jenson appropriately distinguishes God's self-defining conversation and its openness. God speaks to us and brings us to himself. We can speak to God in this and not become one of the three whose conversation is God; this is because we are not one of the three whose speech and response is ontologically basic to God. Jenson suggest that our speech is not 'primeval to the other two. Therefore, one who comes into this life does not become a divine identity, does not become one of those whose life it is.'⁸⁹

IV. The Freedom of God

The question lurking in the shadows at every turn of this thesis is about the nature of the Father, Son and Spirit's freedom. This is all the more critical when it is clear that Jenson's theological ontology attempts to appropriate the prior descriptions of the person and unite the persons acts and being. If God is free, then it must be affirmed that God is not dependent on anything outside of himself to be himself as perfectly good, loving, and beautiful. This basic notion – however it is secured or conceptually developed – is essential within any theological system that describes God as gracious in his acting towards his creatures. As was noted in conversation with Athanasius this has traditionally been secured by a strong distinction between God's being and his acts of creation and salvation. In our analysis of Jenson's theological ontology it was seen that this distinction in its traditional sense is badly 'wrenched.' This happens as the personal particularity of Jesus Christ and his Father and their Spirit pushes Jenson to think of their mutual action as constitutive of the divine being. This was made explicit at three points:

1. Jenson's conception of God as the one necessary being in whom essence and existence are united in the perfect unity of willing that is open to participation;
2. Jenson's assertion that the Father, Son and Spirit's single unified action is the being of God;
3. Jenson's assertion that the infinity of God's love is a temporal movement that is inseparable from the life of Jesus of Nazareth.

⁸⁹ *ST I*, 226.

To explore the implications of these conclusions relative to the notion of freedom we will recur one last time to a comparison of Jenson and Karl Barth.

IV.1 God's Being in Act, Love and Freedom

To begin it is essential to describe again Barth's discussion of the reality of God. Barth's discussion includes three subsections on the being of God in act, the being of God as the one who loves, and the freedom of this living and loving God. As was noted in the first chapter Barth's basic task in the whole discussion is to say that God is-which Barth suggests is the single and most difficult task of proclamation and theology.⁹⁰ Barth suggests that proper reflection recognizes from the beginning that the only being of God to consider is that of Father, Son, and Spirit as it is in revelation and in God's eternity.⁹¹ This is paired with the demand that we begin with God's works and avoid collapsing God into his works.⁹² When we do so Barth suggests that we recognize that God's reality holds together his act and being. God is the subject of his acts and so is the one who determines their significance, but is not wholly determined by the acts themselves. After this general discussion, Barth specifies three things: first, God is an event and more specifically the transcendent event of Jesus Christ's life, death, and resurrection; second, God is the person who determines and reveals what personhood entails; and, finally, that God's personal and eventful reality is his own conscious, willed, and executed decision.

Barth tries to clarify these general notions by specifying the act, which God is and its definite content. To begin, Barth asserts that God's self-revelation manifests the truth that God is and is as Father, Son, and Spirit. This trinitarian name is then used to tell us two things: first, that God seeks and creates fellowship with us; second, that that he does so freely. This is true since because God has fellowship in himself without his act create.⁹³ As such, this creating and seeking is specified as an overflow of love free from need or external pressure. This act is God's essence, but is not necessary for this essence to be actual.

⁹⁰ *CD*, II/1, 258.

⁹¹ *CD*, II/1, 261.

⁹² *CD*, II/1, 260.

⁹³ *CD*, II/1, 273.

At the heart of this clarification is Barth's notion of God's will. God wills to be our God and for us to be his people: 'He wills to belong to us and He wills that we should belong to Him.'⁹⁴ He wills to be God and for us to be his creatures and He wills to affirm himself, but does so in a way that He is in relationship to us. This focus on willing and the two prior affirmations come together in the statement that 'as and before he seeks fellowship with us *he wills and completes* this fellowship in Himself.'⁹⁵ Recognizing this 'as' and 'before' Barth concludes that God is the one who loves and who loves freely, graciously, and as an end in itself. This love is necessary to who God is, for it is his being, but it is free in relation to its external object. God could be love in and of himself, and in fact he is, but he is also love for us.⁹⁶ This is the wonderful twofold dynamic of his will, according to Barth, that he *wills* to have and be love for himself and in himself and to be the same God for and with us.⁹⁷ This implies that God is the divine loving that truly knows, wills and acts because in this loving the subject and object are one.⁹⁸ This freedom of God as a person is made known to us by and in Jesus Christ when the divine loving affirms itself and turns beyond itself to its creature and catches them up into himself. In this sense, God is the event identical to his self-willed and achieved loving in eternity. This perfect and perfectly free loving is then affirmed in the event of Jesus' life, death and resurrection, which reveals to us God's being as love and brings us into the love that God is as Father, Son, and Spirit.⁹⁹

In the last sub-section, the 'Being of God in Freedom,' Barth tightens the argument by asking the same question, who is God? Again, God's living and loving – or God's Lordship – answers the question. It does so because God's insuperable actuality reveals his sovereign choosing, deciding, willing and doing.¹⁰⁰ This answer has two aspects that clarify God's freedom in himself and for us; God is free in himself as metaphysically independent and is free in his act for us as God, as our

⁹⁴ CD II/1, 274.

⁹⁵ CD II/1, 275 [emphasis added.]

⁹⁶ CD II/1, 280.

⁹⁷ CD II/1, 281.

⁹⁸ CD II/1, 285.

⁹⁹ Eberhard Jungel, *God's Being is in Becoming: the Trinitarian Being of God in the Theology of Karl Barth* trans. John Webster (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2001), 33-36, explains this basic dynamic as God's self-interpretation in time through which God's revelation corresponds to God's being in eternity.

¹⁰⁰ CD II/1, 301.

Lord. Barth prioritizes the latter and discusses the former against this background. The result is the affirmation that 'God must not only be unconditioned, but in the absoluteness with which he sets us this fellowship, He can and will be conditioned.'¹⁰¹ In this dialectical sense God can have his existence in and with his creation as *His* being because he begins and ends with himself.¹⁰² This positive affirmation of God's existence as the one who loves us as Father, Son, and Spirit is balanced by the negative affirmation that this life and loving does not have to take place. Bringing this positive and negative reflection together Barth suggests that 'He does not need his own being to be who he is.'¹⁰³ This is the case because God's self-realisation does not add anything to who God is, but only affirms his being as love. This dialectical balance is captured in Barth's summary statement that 'it is not that His being needs this confirmation, but that the very fact of His being, free from all need, is in fact this confirmation.'¹⁰⁴

Barth's notion of secondary aseity makes it clear that God's relation to creation is real relation, but one in which no self-determination of the creature can 'influence' the creator.¹⁰⁵ This transcendence allows for the infinite variety of God's action and the most radical immanence. Both of these aspects of God's reality and life are captured, for Barth, in Jesus Christ who is the norm for all such reflection. He is so because he discloses and develops God's freedom. He is the one who reveals God's will and is the subject and object of that willing. He wills and in this willing God wills himself as the transcendent and immanent other, as the one who is before God's willing of external fellowship and as the one who completes the fellowship of God in loving God's people.

From the forgoing it is fair to conclude that, for Barth, God is his act of decision that is perfect in eternity and perfectly actualized in time. When Barth specifies that Jesus is the object and the subject of this decision this conceptuality is made more radical as it is enlightened by scriptures witness. This is taken up at several places, but at each point Barth wants to assert that the Word is Jesus Christ. He alone is the one who grounds creation. He is the content and subject of the divine will and because of this he underlies and is superior to all created reality. With clarity

¹⁰¹ CD II/1, 303.

¹⁰² CD II/1, 304.

¹⁰³ CD II/1, 306.

¹⁰⁴ CD II/1, 306.

¹⁰⁵ CD II/1, 312.

and emphasis Barth asserts that the Word is Jesus Christ, that Jesus Christ was in the beginning with God, and that he chooses as God. In summarizing the effects of these decisions Bruce McCormack explains that 'to say that 'Jesus Christ' is the subject of election is to say that there is no *logos asarkos* in the absolute sense of a mode of existence in the second 'person' of the Trinity, which is independent of the determination for Incarnation; no 'eternal Son' if that Son is seen in abstraction from the gracious election in which God determined and determines never to be God apart from the human race.'¹⁰⁶ In other words, if God is his act decision and its actualization and Jesus is God with God, then Jesus is the Son who is chosen by God the Father and is the Son who decides to be with and for us. There is no other Son than the one who is chosen for this end and chooses to accept this end as God and man.

Despite this, Barth posits the necessity of the *logos asarkos* in certain moments where God's freedom is questioned in relation to his inner essence.¹⁰⁷ At this point there appears to be a Trinity prior to God's decision. This Trinity is distinct therefore from his act of decision that is otherwise described as his being. McCormack notes this irregularity and argues that Barth 'creates space for an independent doctrine of the Trinity; a triune being of God which was seen independent of the covenant of grace'¹⁰⁸ At this specific point Barth seems to prioritise the existence of the persons as modes of being in abstraction from their act in eternity, which is their being. This happens, according to McCormack, as Barth posits 'a mode of existence in God above and prior to God's gracious election.'¹⁰⁹ This leads to the crucial question for McCormack: 'How can he (or anyone else) know that God is triune in and for himself, independent of his eternal will to be revealed?'¹¹⁰ In his description of Jesus as the Word, in his doctrine of election, and in his theological ontology Barth pushes the tradition forward to clarify the object of theology in light of God's self-revelation in Christ. This happens when he keeps the

¹⁰⁶ Bruce McCormack 'Grace and Being: The role of God's gracious election in Karl Barth's theological ontology' in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth* ed. John Webster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 100. Hereafter abbreviated *Grace and Being*, and page.

¹⁰⁷ In this thesis I have argued that this is the case at critical moments in his doctrine of election and in his Christology.

¹⁰⁸ *Grace and Being*, 100.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

Trinity and revelation together through his focus on the centrality and ontological primacy of election. The result is that the will of God is specified as his being that is inseparable from the life and person of Jesus of Nazareth. However, at this point, this assertion of Christ's centrality is threatened by a movement into the darkness of a *Deus absconditus*.

Under the pressure of securing God's freedom in his ontological independence it seems that Barth's negative moment of secondary reflection controls his description of God's freedom. This in turn threatens to mitigate what is most clarifying and impressive in his trinitarian description and most insightful in his theological ontology. If God's being is to its depth the decision that is made by and about Jesus Christ, then there cannot be beyond or behind this being a Son that is other than this person, nor can there be a word in God's self that is other than the one who will be and so is the crucified and risen Word.¹¹¹ God's will is the Son who creates all things with the Father and redeems all things in the external act that reveals this will. According to Barth's explicit and formal reflection God's freedom is secured by his decision that is his act of being, which is perfect in eternity and perfectly revealed in God's history with us. Behind or above this decision, which is his act, there is no God, no other Son or no being in essence that grounds the gratuity of God's decision.

IV.2 God's Being as Act, Love and Faithfulness

Jenson grasps this critical insight. He also grasps the radical implication it has for the identity of the second person of God and for the way we conceive of God's being and freedom. When Jenson abandons the negative priority and possibility and takes up without qualification the confession that Jesus is the Son and the Son is Jesus, he is forced to think of God's freedom and ontological otherness beyond this problematic reflex. As has been noted he begins to do so by focussing on the Resurrection to identify the persons whose freedom is to be described. Once it is clear that Jesus, his

¹¹¹ Ironically, if Barth suggests that Jesus is the subject and object of election and maintains a place for a Son that is other than Jesus, then it appears that his description of Jesus operates in the mode of a personal predicate that is true by the communication of attributes, but not really true of the object/subject *per se*. As was discussed earlier, this move away from the subject of election and the Incarnation was the first and fatal move of the Lutheran tradition that Barth so trenchantly criticised and that Jenson avoids.

Father and their Spirit are the one God Jenson moves to describe God's freedom as the unity of their life/act. This being and act is the perfect expression of God's love that is revealed as his will for all things. According to Jenson, Jesus Christ is the logos of this willing, as the centre and end of God's willing that unites all things as their saviour and judge. He is the one who reveals God's will and way and in whose light the persons of the Father and Spirit are more clearly seen.

Like Barth, Jenson defines the contingency of this act as the freedom of election. To elucidate this more precisely it is proper to summarize the way that Jenson describes the free choosing of each person. In this context we should begin with the Father. Most basically, Jenson describes the Father as the sole antecedent chooser that determines all things in the way that he intends the Son.¹¹² If God's act of election is the ground of his triune being and the Father is the source of the Son and Spirit, then the decision of the Father to be one with this Son is equivalent to the generation of the Son and the procession of the Spirit.¹¹³ In one context, Jenson argues that this insight leads to the confession that the Father is God and so is *in se* freedom. In other words, the Father, in his personal particularity, secures the Trinity's ontological freedom. However, as we argued earlier, this personal particularity necessarily includes and is actual with and only with the Son and Spirit.

This implies that the freedom of God is necessarily triune freedom; the choice of the Father includes the personal actuality of the Son. More precisely, the response of the Son is, according to Jenson, included in this primal act of decision of the Father. As was noted in discussing his christology, Jenson specifies this response as the life of Jesus of Nazareth- from his birth to his daily faithfulness to the culmination of this loving response on the cross. This inclusion is possible and actual because the spoken and speaking Word is Jesus Christ in the totality of his personal actuality. In the unity of God's being this willing of God the Father and the response of the Son are distinct temporal events united in God's time. The Son's decision, for Jenson, is therefore the many decisions of faithfulness, perfected or exemplified in his decision in Gethsemane. The Son is the perfect expression of the Father's freedom and the perfect response of free love that is constitutive of this freedom. The perfection of this relation is dramatically revealed in the Son's expression of perfect love when he

¹¹² *ST* I, 220; *ST* II, 171.

¹¹³ McCormack, *Grace and Being*, 100, makes this point explicit in discussing the implications of Barth's insights.

forgives those who crucify him and so brings them into the love he shares and is with the Father. As a result, the event that is God's being is the speaking of the word that begins before and without creation and yet enters into created temporality or history.

Finally, we come to the Spirit, whom Jenson consistently defines as the freedom of God. This has various meanings relevant to the two specific decisions just mentioned because the Spirit is the Spirit of God and Christ. Jenson suggests that the Spirit is the power of God's self-transcendence that frees the Father to speak his word and let the word be really other than his person. Reciprocally, the Son's life as response is actual through the enlivening and perfecting power of the Spirit. This power comes from the future or telos that God the Father chooses for all things in choosing and sending the Son and in breathing the Spirit. The liveliness of the Father's decision and the Son's response is the freedom of their fellowship that is actual in and through and as the Spirit. As these decisions of the Father, of his Spirit and of his Son are actual there is the perfect unity and love of the one God. As such, the history that God chooses and is are one in the perfect mutuality of the persons. God is not other than or more than this history that is chosen for us and for God in which God is over and beyond creation even as he is in creation and the end of creation.

In light of the primacy of election that grounds God's triune being, Bruce McCormack suggests that 'the works of God ad intra (the trinitarian processions) find their ground in the first of the works ad extra (viz. election).'¹¹⁴ This, he suggests, follows from the insight that the decision for the covenant of grace is the act of God that is his being. In Jenson's description of the persons and their mutual life, this suggestion is worked out in response to scripture's witness to the particularity and persons and their perfect mutuality. The Father, Son, and Spirit each have decisions to make that determine God's being. More explicitly, these decisions initiate, actualize and perfect his being in freedom as a history. In the unity of this life God creates space for others because God's being is the ground of being that is open to participation. Ultimately, Jenson is right to identify the one God from his acts for us. He is right to try to clarify the identities of these three before asking how they are one, how they are eternal and how they are free as the infinite communion of love. In this he moves us forward in the project of faith seeking understanding in light of God's

¹¹⁴ *Grace and Being*, 100.

revelation. This general methodological insight granted, his description of the persons and their freedom hangs on several interrelated points that must be noted and questioned.

First, the description of election and so of God's freedom implies a sense of personal agency of the Father, Son, and Spirit, which Barth suggests is mythological or anthropomorphic.¹¹⁵ For Barth, any description of election as a covenant of redemption appears to split God, lead to dualism, and forget that the covenant of election is between God and man. In response to this we must recall Jenson's description of God's mutuality in act and being where there is distinction, difference, and personal particularity in the triune communion. However, for Jenson, this distinction does not divide the persons, the one will of God, or the unity of this communion. If the persons are ultimately distinct and act in ways exclusively appropriate to their hypostatic actuality, then we should not resist the idea of a mutual subjectivity that includes personal and particular agency. More pointedly, we must remember that for Jenson and his courageous Christology the second person of God is the human person Jesus. Therefore, this decision of God, which is actual in the unity of his communion, does necessarily include God and man, where the man included is included truly and fully as God, as the God-man, as Jesus Christ. As a result of these two things Jenson can affirm the most radical difference and perfect unity in God that avoids any sense of dualism in God's being.

Finally, and more critically, Jenson's description of God's history coheres because the persons of God can in some sense be assigned to the poles of time that are distinctive related to their personal particularity. There is an element of truth in this.¹¹⁶ Most obviously, there are decisions that each person makes that are truly made by that person and that are actual in one aspect of God's temporality and not others. Again, the most obvious example is the decision made by the Son in Gethsemane that is not made by another person or at another time. This noted, it is essential to affirm that God's life is a temporal sequence that includes the life of Jesus of Nazareth. Despite this essential insight Jenson's description of the persons is

¹¹⁵ See CD 4/1, 65. McCormack senses this and immediately tries to bring his suggestion in line with the notion of a single subjectivity in three modes of being.

¹¹⁶ Barth grants that there is a loose correlation here, but rightly resists the conclusion that Jenson draws from this. See George Hunsinger, 'Mysterium Trinitatis: Karl Barth's Conception of Eternity' in *Disruptive Grace: studies in the theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 198.

limited by this conceptuality in a significant way. Most directly, his clarifying insight in to the mutuality of the person's agency is obscured as the person's particularity is located and in some sense limited by their relation to the poles of time. Most obviously and most troubling is the oversight of the decision that Jesus Christ makes before creation. This pre-creation decision of Jesus Christ is made in obedient response to the Father that is essentially part of who he is as God and man. This oversight in turn creates an ambiguity about the generation of the Son and the procession of the Spirit. We will return to this critique and this problem in the next chapter. At this point it is more important to note the essential insight that Jenson's discussion of God's freedom clarifies, namely, that God is free in the perfect *temporal* life of the persons. This life is graciously, yet truly, determined by the Father, Son, and Spirit's *mutual* choosing that is actual before, in and after created time. The perfection of this choosing is God's being that is radically other as this choosing is characterized by perfect mutual faithfulness, love, and so holiness or righteousness. In and only in the revelation of this life and love is the difference between the creator and creature known and actual. In other words, God's perfect and perfectly loving action maintains the distinction between the creator and his creatures; the triune God enforces this distinction by taking action.¹¹⁷

V. The Holiness of God

Jenson's theological ontology makes it clear that the triune persons' mutual faithfulness or holiness is the ground of the triune God's wholly otherness. Although Jenson consistently acknowledges the traditional affirmation of God's ontological independence, he resists any substantial logical place to this consideration. Developing this logic, Jenson is left with two basic affirmations: first, that God alone is essentially holy, and, second, that the triune life is the sole necessary life that creates and sustains and perfects other life. Jenson treads this path because he believes that the temporal actuality of God's history with us is constitutive of the life he freely chooses and lives. More exactly, he treads this path because his focus is

¹¹⁷ Robert Jenson, 'Creator and Creature,' *International Journal of Systematic Theology* vol. 4 no. 2 (2002), 219.

determined by and limited to God's self-communication that finds its controlling logos in Jesus Christ. The effect is that God's gracious self-giving and his eternal rule of history are witnessed to in their essential unity. In sum, God sustains and perfects creation, which is a history, through his sovereign rule and merciful acts of redemption to the end of bringing in his new creation on earth. This action is the action of God that reveals who God is and why there is a creation of reality that is other than God. This willing of creation and salvation is not random or disjointed, but controlled by God's one will and purpose that is Jesus Christ, whose acts reveal and determine the triune life and distinguish it from created life.

Jenson explicitly justifies this connection between soteriology and theological ontology; he suggests that 'the incarnation is neither an emergency measure nor construable apart from sin, that precisely the gospel of forgiveness is not an afterthought.'¹¹⁸ The implication of this is that the Word, will, and Son of God are from eternity self-determined for our salvation and God's glory. To situate this Jenson quotes Martin Luther's radical connection of creation and salvation: 'God created us just in order to redeem us.'¹¹⁹ Developing this notion Jenson asserts that 'the goal of God's path is just what does in fact happen with Jesus the Christ, and sin and evil belong to God's intent precisely- but only- as they do appear in Christ's victory over them.'¹²⁰ He continues and concludes that 'a mystery of suffering, of an interplay between created regularities and evil, must belong to the plot of God's history with us and to the character of its crisis and fulfilment.'¹²¹

Without abstracting from this story Jenson tries to make it clear that God is God with and for us freely as he is faithful to his promises and free in his self-giving. In this gracious action God is identified by and with his people and by and with the Son who saves this people and brings them to the Father in their Spirit. His graciousness and self-justification in the Resurrection of the crucified Son, which reveals what is actual and so possible for God, also reveals his original intention for creation, his circumscribing and defeating of evil, and his holiness as the one God.

¹¹⁸ *ST I*, 73.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ *ST I*, 73-4.

The triune God is identified in history and as freely determined in this person's history, but is not identical with the totality of the world's history.¹²²

V.1 The Terror of the Finite?

This directness, which follows the way of God's identity in creation to define the being of God, has been critiqued in a stringent fashion by David Bentley Hart. Most generally, Hart takes issue with Jenson's attempt to write a biography of God, or to 'find in the story of Jesus, and all that attaches thereto, an essential narrativity in the identity of God.'¹²³ More specifically, Hart has a problem with Jenson's starting point that identifies the economic and immanent trinities. This relates to his critique of Jenson's notion of election where 'God the Father from eternity has determined that he shall be the God he is in his unique relation to the man Jesus.'¹²⁴ This implies, according to Hart, that God's eternal being is not to be distinguished from his historical achievement.¹²⁵ This inevitably leads, in Hart's judgement, to the conclusion that God depends on a necessary creation. The result is that 'God is robbed of his true transcendence and creation of its true gratuity.' In contrast, he continues and suggests that 'the freedom of God from ontic determination is the ground of creation's goodness.'¹²⁶

Hart's most trenchant critique of Jenson's project questions the possibility of any ontic conditioning in God. He asserts that 'if somehow in the abyssal pastness of God's eternity...there is a decision that God's eternal temporality will be unfolded according to the history of Jesus – in his relation to all human and cosmic history-

¹²² This is the point at which it is necessary to answer explicitly the critique that Jenson's identification of God makes creation necessary to God's being. George Hunsinger, 'Robert Jenson's Systematic Theology: a review essay,' *Scottish Journal of Theology* vol. 55 no. 2 (2002), 161-200, has most famously offered this critique by casting Jenson in Hegel's mould. At this point we will use David Bentley Hart as a conversation partner because his critique is more compact and takes Jenson on his own terms. Despite this difference, Hart and Hunsinger agree that Jenson's problems flow from a failure to appreciate the classical affirmations that God is simple, atemporal, and impassable; both also agree that a strong doctrine of the immanent Trinity guards these basic notions.

¹²³ David Bentley Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite, The Aesthetics of Christian Truth* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2003), 160. Hereafter abbreviated *Beauty*, and page.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ *Beauty*, 161.

¹²⁶ *Beauty*, 158.

then God's final identity is absolutely and necessarily bound to the conditions he elects...And this means that God's identity is in some absolute sense inseparable not only from the life and person of Jesus of Nazareth, but from the entire order of contingencies that Jesus inhabits.'¹²⁷ He continues and argues that 'everything that allows Jesus to be who and what he is, all the historical determinations before and after, belong to that identity, as does every condition of cosmic and historical becoming.'¹²⁸ In effect, Hart assumes that the integration of election and Incarnation confuses the necessary being of God and his gracious acts. Therefore, Hart suggests that

if God's identity is constituted in his triumph over evil, then evil belongs eternally to his identity...All of history is the horizon of this drama, and since no analogical interval is allowed to be introduced between God's being as Trinity and his acts as Trinity in time, all of history is this identity: every painful death of a child, every casual act of brutality, all war, famine, pestilence, disease, murder...all are moments in the identity of God, resonances within the event of his being, aspects of the occurrence of his essence; all of this is crucible in which God comes into his own elected reality.

In sum, Hart suggests that Jenson's trinitarian doctrine fails Heidegger's test, Anselm's test, Ivan Karamazov's test, and so ultimately exchanges a mythological projection for the true God in its lust for metaphysical completeness. He implies that this is the case for all supralapsarian descriptions of God, but specifically critiques Jenson's supralapsarian description of God as an attempt to transcend the distinction between being and becoming.¹²⁹

When this is attempted, according to Hart, there is one possibility, that being is identified with the totality of becoming. In other words, if God the Father chooses to be one with the man Jesus Christ, just as he is in the totality of his life with and for

¹²⁷ *Beauty*, 163.

¹²⁸ *Beauty*, 164.

¹²⁹ *Beauty*, 163. This specific aspect of Jenson's project leads Hart to the conclusion that Jenson flirts with and inevitably accepts a Hegelian conclusion: that the world process is the other in and through which God's being is actualized. Peter C. Hodgson, *God in History: Shapes of Freedom* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), 44-6 & 51-70, offers a moderate interpretation of Hegel's Trinitarian Figuration; he identifies several basic characteristic of Hegel's trinitarianism: first, God is not God apart from the totality of the world's finite history; second, in and through the world God becomes concrete and living; third, the history of Christ re-enacts God's eternal history; finally, God's infinite life moves beyond the persons of God to pure spirit. Hodgson's summary makes it clear that Hegel's and Jenson's trinitarianism differs on one small but significant point: the confession that Jesus Christ is *homoousios to Patri*.

us, then God's being is necessarily confused with the creation he chooses to have and redeem. Is this the case? Is it the case that Jenson's supra-lapsarianism or directness ultimately leads to a binding of the real God and an exaltation of a merely ontic idol? If God is identified by and with Jesus of Nazareth is he necessarily identified by and with all of history? Can there be real relation and real distinction between God the Father and Jesus or between this triune God and their people? To answer these questions it is helpful to look at the way Jenson describes creation, relates this act to the content of God's will, and his will to all his work.

V.2 Why did God become Man? Why did God create the World?

When Jenson describes the character of creation, he tries to answer two intertwined questions, 'would God have become incarnate without the fall?' and 'Does God create for his sake or his creatures?' He begins with the second question in hope that both options are true and compatible; like Ireaneus, he wants to affirm that 'the glory of God is the living human person; the life of a human person is the vision of God.'¹³⁰ Using Jonathan Edwards, Jenson posits that God is the source and end of creation.¹³¹ Next, Jenson suggests that God's perfections consist or are real in a way that his actions and so his effects on us are not external to his self-concern. As a result, God's glorifying himself does not preclude our blessing, but can graciously include this end as well. In effect, Jenson implies that in God's life his purpose of glorifying himself and being merciful are united in the perfection of his willing. This is made more precise when Jenson clarifies that triune acts should be conceived as acts of self-communication. These speech acts, which determine and glorify God's being, result in communion and love where God values himself and us in himself. This affirmation answers Iranaeus' notion that the glory of God is the living human person if the Word who is with God in the beginning is Jesus Christ.

When Jenson confirms the second half of Ireaneaus' axiom, that God values himself when he values us, he uses the notion of the *totus Christus* to keep two things properly distinguished. He begins and notes that this two-sided affirmation depends on our union in Christ where he is truly or actually himself as a person in relation to and distinction from his human community. If this is the case, then God both loves

¹³⁰ Ireaneus, *Against All Heresies*, iv.20.7, quoted by Jenson, *ST II*, 17.

¹³¹ For the following see *ST II*, 18-19.

and honours himself and loves and honours us when he loves the Son. Again, this is true because we are in Christ, for whom and in whom all things are created. In other words, the church participates by grace in Christ who is the alpha and omega of creation and so is the beginning, end and content of all things that God wills.

More radically, Jenson notes that Edwards can even assert that 'Heaven and earth were created that the Son of God might be complete in a spouse.'¹³² Noting this Jenson concludes that the adequate communication of the Father's goodness is eternally accomplished in the Son, who is Jesus with his body. In his self-communication and in the Son's response the dilemma of our good and God's glory is resolved. This happens as is Jesus Christ identified as the Logos of creation. This person that is ultimate or eschatological in created history is seen in retrospect to be first and so the foundation of all things in God's intention, will and being.

This logic entails a strong realism of the sort that Karl Barth expresses in the truculent phrase 'because *servatio*, therefore *creatio*.'¹³³ Accepting this realism Jenson attempts to follow in Barth's footsteps and accept the great problem posed by this. This great problem is that nothing can be said logically to explain the source of evil.¹³⁴ As a result, he admits that 'the evil and sin in God's creation will always be reason to deny him; Luther's rationalist will always have arguments for his conclusion.'¹³⁵ This given, Jenson's discussion of evil is framed by two things, a stringent resistance to theodicy and the logic of grace and/as election. Jenson connects these things in a discussion of the patently orthodox assertion that 'evil resorts from the action of creatures once they are there.'¹³⁶ Jenson accepts this but notes the difficulty that is posed by 'the same considerations that show how creaturely freedom is possible at all also close off any attempt to *justify* God's way in our eyes by blaming creaturely free will for evil.'¹³⁷ These considerations, according to Jenson, make it clear that God's will is absolute in such a way that he wills our choices and

¹³² *ST* II, 19.

¹³³ Karl Barth, *KD* III/3, 91; quoted in *ST* II, 20. Jonathan Edwards, *A History of the Work of Redemption, Doctrine.ii.i*, was aware of this implication and could assert that 'this world...was doubtless created to be a stage upon which this ...work of redemption should be transacted;' quoted by Jenson, *ST* II, 20.

¹³⁴ Nicholas Wolterstorff, 'Barth on Evil,' *Faith and Philosophy* vol. 13 no.4 (1996), 585, rightly notes that for Barth the explanation of evil is impossible; we can nevertheless identify evil, which Barth does with the notion of *das Nichtige*.

¹³⁵ *ST* II, 23.

¹³⁶ *ST* II, 21.

¹³⁷ *ST* II, 21, emphasis added.

we will these same choices and yet really will in the process. Because our free willing is by God's will, our willing is not outside his willing. Therefore, Adam and Eve's choice to disobey God are ultimately irrational choices that are inexplicable given God's goodness, presence in creation, and controlling purposes.

Jenson does not expound on God's willing or non-willing of evil; he merely states the implication: that God intends or knowingly allows evil as a part of his total will to create and redeem humans. This is done to his glory and their good. In the light of this end Jenson recognizes that creation, the cross, and even sin, in some 'conceptually and morally nearly unmanageable' sense, are good as they have a place in God's intention for redemption.¹³⁸ They are good for this end as they are fitting aspects of God's overall intention to bring those he creates to himself in love and mercy. This, according to Jenson, does not blame God for evil or for the particular manifestations that are actual in creation.¹³⁹ Nor does it call evil good or necessary. Instead, it develops what can be said about God and evil in light of Christ's defeat of evil that freely, but actually determines his hypostatic actuality as the second person of God. In other words, Jenson's discussion of creation is controlled by the confession that Jesus is God the Son. This one and the same is, for Jenson, the content and form of God's will and so the Son with whom our identification of the Father can and must begin. Again, Jenson's confession of God's goodness and holiness and his discussion of God's intention in and for creation are controlled by the gospel's description of Jesus and his Father and the Nicene confession, which identifies one Son- the crucified and risen Jesus. Where does this leave Jenson? Or, what, if any thing, can Jenson say about evil?

V.3 Faith as the Fullness of Reasoning

¹³⁸ *ST II*, 20.

¹³⁹ Jenson, *ST II*, 21, notes Jonathan Edwards incautious suggestion that 'The fall of the devils was wisely permitted and ordered to give occasion for a redemption from that evil they should introduce.' This more logically stringent form of Supralapsarianism has been recently espoused by Alvin Plantinga; see 'Supralapsarianism, or 'O Felix Culpa'' in *Christian Faith and the Problem of Evil* ed. Peter van Inwagen (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004) 1-25. Plantinga argues that the best of possible worlds would necessarily include Incarnation and Redemption, that this entails sin, suffering, and evil, and that God brings about this incomparable good and so justifies this necessary evil. This position is a shift for Plantinga who traditionally resisted all theodicies as 'tepid, shallow and ultimately frivolous.'

Ultimately Jenson's resistance to theodicy and his notion of God's sovereignty in and over our choosing leave him in the place of confession. In this he recognizes our sinfulness, God's gracious goodness, and the one remaining refuge, that God justifies himself beyond our comprehension in the Resurrection. In the light of God's actual life with us, the divine drama in Jenson's words, we have 'more "justification" of God's creating act than we could without knowing it have dreamed of discovering.'¹⁴⁰ This given, faith, as it is demanded in the creeds, is a 'nevertheless,' or a trust in God's ultimate and inexplicable goodness.¹⁴¹ It is trust in God who gives himself to us in Christ as our Father, who comes to us in the Spirit, and gives us adequate faith, hope and love. Included in this is a vision of the kingdom where the evil that is now defeated will be no more. If we grant that the Father, Son, and Spirit are God, then faith gives fullness or adequateness to our reason, but does not give us the answers to the problem of evil. If there is one God, Jesus, his Father and their Spirit, and their life is the end of all things, then we know that God is not in himself an absolute will that creates for his pleasure without care for his creatures. God's acts are not irrational, but are grounded in the concrete man Jesus Christ. His life, death and resurrection reveal the logic in which evil is not a problem, but a defeated power that will not be and so is a non-ens.

In this position of confession or response to God's self-revealing and justifying Jenson suggests that we must avoid certain things and accept others. We must avoid saying that God's willing necessarily includes evil or that his goodness implies evil. More concretely, we must accept our responsibility for sins and horrors. This means that we do not posit the necessity of any of history's horrors perpetuated by our neighbour and our selves while we nevertheless confess our guilt. Again, this confession of guilt and acceptance of logical limitations is possible in light of-and only in the light of- God's gracious overcoming of our irrational self-determination.

¹⁴⁰ *ST* II, 24.

¹⁴¹ Alan Torrance, 'Does God Suffer?' in *Christ in our Place* ed. Trevor Hart and Daneil Thimell (Exeter: Paternoster, 1989), 368, offers a similar conclusion in the face of the irrationality of evil and in light of the incarnation; he suggests that 'Christ alone can speak here as he alone addresses the kind of suffering which ruptures language and meaning-not as the one who suddenly introduces meaning into stark meaninglessness but as the one in whom God enters into and takes to himself the very God-forsakenness of men and women, the very depths of Hell and the absence of God.'

We can identify evil in the light of Christ, but cannot explain evil in light of God's gracious choice to be one with us in Christ.

The sufficiency of this answer hangs on previous answers given in this thesis. More specifically, this suggestion hangs on the claim that God the Father can freely choose Jesus Christ as the Son by and with whom he is identified. Additionally, this depends on the way that Jenson thinks of this choice as the Father and so God's eternal self-determination to be God with this Son and their Spirit. If this is plausible, then Jenson's description of God's life in creation that includes his identification by and with Israel, Israel's Christ and his body is not hopelessly confused. Instead, it is a proper description of who God is for and with us. In addition, it is a proper identification of who God is in himself made in light of the free Choice of the Father to be God with his Son and our Lord.

Finally, this framework hangs on the confession that Jesus Christ is the Son with whom the Father and Spirit are God. In particular it hangs on the confession that evil is defeated and done away with in this Son's crucifixion, death, and resurrection. If this is the event of God's victory over sin and Christ is the victor with the Father and Spirit, then he is distinguished over and against the world in general and his people in particular. If this Son identifies with his people despite their sin and despite their active role in his death, then there is a sufficient distance of difference between the Holy God and his sinful people. If these things hold, then there must be a way that God wills all things in Christ, is identified by this one who is actual in, but not as all created things. If these basic affirmations distinguish Jesus, his Father and the Spirit from the totality of created history, they do so as they relate all created things to the Lord in and through this Son. Ultimately, this leaves us with a question: can Jesus Christ, the person who is never merely a human person, mediate all things to the Father as the ground and goal of creation and so as the one and only Son? More immediately, the question is whether his life is an adequate revelation of God's will and way for all things.

Jenson's last word on this last question is given to Maximus' aphorism: 'the one who knows the mystery of the cross and tomb, knows the reasons of things. The one who is initiated into the infinite power of the Resurrection, knows the purpose for which God knowingly created all.'¹⁴² As Jenson notes, this is knowledge of those

¹⁴² *Centuries* (PG 90,) 1108A-B; quoted by Jenson, *ST* II, 24.

initiated in the mystery of God; this is knowledge of those who celebrate the eucharist and so find themselves in a community that is led to worship God and trust in his goodness. This is not, therefore, a goodness that we can or should describe as the infinite goodness of *apathia*. Nor is it a goodness describable as the perfect purity of transcendent love, where transcendence and love are notions disattached from the life, death and resurrection of the Son. To open the door to negative definitions of goodness, love or freedom appears at this point to be a failure of faith.

In faith we know the Father as the one who chose us and did so in choosing Christ. In response to this we can know why we are and where the church and all things stands in relation to evil. Ultimately, the church is the community that tastes and sees that God is good and awaits the revelation of that goodness which has been and will be. This tasting and seeing is for Jenson an anticipation of what will be and is in God that is known now through the power of the Spirit. Knowledge in this sense is of God's integrated life as Father, Son, and Spirit. This life in its infinite freedom and love embraces created time and heals time's wounds. This is possible and actual in the unity of God's decision to create, redeem, and perfect reality that is other than God. In sum, Jenson asserts that 'God's history with us is one integral act of sovereignty, comprehended as his decision to reconcile us with himself in Christ Jesus.'¹⁴³ This integral decision is essential to the whole history that is creation. This is the case because it is the beginning and end of God's willing that originates, actualizes, and perfects the movement that is the person's being.

There is a moral critique that can be made of Jenson's trinitarian description and theological ontology, but it is one that abstracts from the God known with Christ in the Spirit. There is a moral critique of the God who gives himself to us in Christ and who proclaims that this Son is the beginning and end of all things, but this is a critique from the outside made within a logic that is determined by another Logos. Whether this answers the question that Anselm, Heidegger or Ivan Karamazov might raise or Hart does raise is irrelevant. The critique that must be answered is the critique that God makes of all our attempts to define goodness, being, and his perfectly good being and life and love in abstraction from his Son. To describe the being of God, it is better that we begin with the Son, as Athanasius insisted. It is

¹⁴³ *ST* II, 178.

better still when we are absolutely clear that the only Son that is, was, and shall be is Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

Continuing the Conversation

I. Intervening in the Consultation

Robert Jenson's identification of the triune God clarifies the relation between the persons, being and freedom of the triune God. This happens most directly when he identifies the persons of God without obfuscating scripture's radically personal description of the triune God. In the last chapter I argued that Jenson's theology is most demanding and decisive when he does this in light of the Resurrection and in relation to the doctrine of election. By placing the Resurrection at the centre of his systematic reflection, he redirects theological ontology to the unity of God's acts and the infinity of the triune life. Jenson begins with the victor and the victory of the triune God over sin and death. As a result he directly describes the persons of God and their freely chosen and perfectly mutual life that is determined in this event.

In retrospect it is possible to describe Jenson's methodology: Jenson begins with the persons of God identified in the canonical witness and by the Creeds and, in turn, thinks of their being, freedom, and eternity. As a result, the freedom of God is described as the infinite and unbounded holiness of God's *intention* to create, redeem, and perfect the world. Central to understanding this is the identification of Jesus Christ as the Logos of the one God's choosing and being. Who God is and how God is are both made known in and through this crucified and resurrected person's life. The final effect of this is that Jenson thinks the events of the Incarnation and Eschaton into the doctrine of God. This is done to identify the triune God of the church with the God of Israel. In other words, Jesus, his Father and their Spirit are the promise making and keeping God. This basic identification leads to the conclusion that the triune community perfectly exists in and through the action that the biblical narrative describes from election to the eschaton.

I have tried in this thesis to interpret sympathetically this dense and demanding identification of the triune God. To do this I have limited myself to Jenson's basic argument about God's identification by and with Jesus Christ. This argument was analyzed through a careful reading of Jenson's trinitarian description and theological ontology. This brought out the critical insight that God's being is freely and truly determined by the mutual life of the persons of God that precedes,

invades, and recapitulates created history. In and through this I have merely noted places of inadequacy and indecision. At this point, it is necessary to turn the tables and ask what if any systematic effects these shortcomings might have on the whole of Jenson's project.

II. Re-Describing the Son

What, we may ask, is the systematic effect of an inadequate description of one person on this identification of God? Moreover, what is the effect of this on Jenson's attempt to clarify the being, unity, and freedom of God? The answer to both questions is grounded in a necessary critique of Jenson's Christology. Because of this we will break out of our pattern of describing the Father, Son, and Spirit and begin with a criticism of Jenson's identification and description of Jesus Christ.

In the chapter on Jenson's identification of the Son it was argued that Jenson makes a critical correction to the tradition's discourse about Christ. He does so because he clearly and ruthlessly asserts that Jesus Christ is Lord as the one Son of God. As Jenson identifies Jesus Christ as the second person of the Trinity he critiques the notion of the *logos asarkos* and classical interpretations of the two natures doctrine. Jenson offers a simple correction in both cases as he is guided by the insight that this human person is the hypostatic identity who with the Father and Spirit is God. Jesus Christ, according to Jenson, is God with God. Following from this clear confession, Jenson reinterprets the classic substantialist notion of nature to describe the two natures in which Jesus participates as two sets of distinct relations. Jesus Christ is a person in relation who constitutes and mediates two sets of relations and so has two natures.

Because of his consistent focus on the Jesus Christ of the gospels Jenson properly emphasises the Son's present sovereignty. He also rightly notes that this is actual through his post-existence or eschatological existence.¹ The crucified Son rules with the Father because he is risen from the dead to be with the Father and Spirit. Jenson's notion of the Word extends this; Jesus is the Word that the Father spoke and continues to speak in the Spirit *because* he is the resurrected Son. The end

¹ That this is the dominate focus of the New Testament goes with debate; for example, see Richard Bauckham, *God Crucified* (Carlisle, Cumbria: Paternoster Press, 1998), 35.

effect is that Jenson is clear about Christ's role as the end of creation, as the judge of creation, and so as the one who will come to bring justice and peace to Israel and the nations. Jenson's vision of the recapitulation of all things in 'the love that is Jesus' captures this and also provides a proper framework for understanding our participation in God's life. Despite these positive contributions, his description of Jesus in response to the action of the Son in created time creates problems. In short, this exclusive focus obscures aspects of the New Testament's description of Jesus Christ; especially lacking is Jenson's description of the pre-existence of Jesus. To make this weakness clear we will briefly examine Jenson's construal of Christ's pre-existence.

II.1 The eternal life and pre-existence of Jesus Christ

Jenson has consistently struggled with describing the pre-existence of Jesus Christ and the generation of the Son. As he notes in his *Systematic Theology*, he at one point confused this essential assertion with the problematic idea of a *logos asarkos* that linearly precedes the actuality of the Son Jesus Christ.² Given this, it is fair to say that his thinking was and still is in process on the matter.³ What does Jenson say about Christ's pre-existence?

Jenson's description of Jesus Christ includes three relative aspects: a discussion of pre-existence, post-existence and eternal existence. To begin with, Jenson asserts that the New Testament witness to Christ's pre-existence is relatively inconsequential.⁴ Within this limited reference Jenson emphasises that it is the person Jesus Christ, and not a *logos asarkos*, that is located with the Father in eternity before creation. The Son who is with the Father in the beginning is Jesus Christ; he is God with God. Most generally, Jenson tries to elucidate this Son's eternal existence with reference to the act of decision that God is. Following Barth, he argues that Jesus Christ is eternal by way of God's decision in eternity as the eternal purpose of God. He suggests that "before" the existence of the Incarnate there is the eternal triune life, in the actuality of which it is decided that there be a created history and a life of

² *ST I*, 141.

³ That this is the case was indicated by Jenson in a personal conversation.

⁴ *ST I*, 139.

the Son in that history.’⁵ In effect, this is a decision about what will be and so is in God’s infinite life. Because of this decision before creation Jesus Christ has a place in the eternal triune life and so is ‘before’ created time with the Father. As the Father freely anticipates what will be and so is, Jesus Christ is with God as God before creation. In this general description Jesus appears to exist before creation because he exists eternally as the will of the Father.

Jenson specifies the actuality of this eternal existence in a problematic way when he describes the resurrection of the Son. According to Jenson, Jesus Christ lives now in God’s eternity in the power of the Spirit just as he lived in the Spirit in all of his life. In one sense this is unproblematic. However, Jenson suggests that Jesus has this unbounded liveliness in eternity as the resurrected Son. Exegeting Romans 1:3 with an eye on eschatology and election, Jenson concludes that the Resurrection determines the Son’s existence. It does so as it is God’s eternal decision about Jesus Christ. Jenson therefore suggests that ‘he is Son in that he is resurrected.’⁶ The implication of this is that the historical or temporally located event of the Resurrection is defined as the eternal event in which and by which the Son becomes one with the Father through the Spirit. In other words, the Son pre-exists the creation of the world because he is risen to be the end of all created things. He is before creation insofar as his resurrection places him in the unlimited life of God; he is free to be before creation because he is the ultimate and exclusive end of creation. In sum, the Son’s pre-existence and eternal existence are specified as aspects of his post-existence.

Jenson tries to clarify this notion of pre-existence through post-existence in his discussion of the ‘pre’ in predestination. Jenson suggests that in both cases the ‘pre’ is primally the futurity of all being and only so is the priority of his anteriority to being, and just so it is the reconciliation of both.’ He continues and explains that ‘the eternal ‘pre’ of Christ’s existence...occurs also within time, as the Resurrection.’⁷ In other words, what is ultimate in God’s intention is the actuality of the Son in the Kingdom; this anticipated end determines the eternal being of God and enables Christ’s pre-existence. As such, the Resurrection is, according to Jenson, the foundation of Christ’s life in eternity. It is the end that determines the beginning.

⁵ *ST I*, 140.

⁶ *ST I*, 142.

⁷ *ST II*, 177

The Resurrection is the means of Christ's entrance into God's eternity and into the antecedence of creation. This event actualizes Jesus' pre-existence to created time and the possibility of his pre-existence in created time.

The ambiguity of this description is captured in Jenson's conclusion where he asserts that 'the freedom in and into which the Son is begotten of the Father is the Spirit.'⁸ Jenson's statement could mean several things. It could be that the Son is begotten of the Father through the Resurrection as he is raised *into* the Spirit. This would mean that the Son has a place with the Father in eternity before creation through the retrogressive efficacy of the Spirit. This would imply that the Resurrection is the sole determination of Christ's life with the Father. In this sense Jenson's notion that 'what obtains in life comes from its end' would mean that all that is actual in God's life is determined by its end. In the power of the Spirit there would be no time in God's eternity when the Son was not, even though there was a created time when he was not yet.

Despite this possibility, Jenson speaks of the Spirit's activity *in* the birth of Jesus to Mary and the actuality of the Spirit's empowering presence *throughout* his life. In this way, the whole of Jesus' life as it includes birth and obedience and death are dependent on his generation from and relation to the Father. This could mean that there is a birth of the Son from the Father that the resurrection confirms. Taking this seriously, it seems that the birth of the Son from the Father is his birth to Mary *and* his Resurrection. As was argued above, the life of the Son from his birth to death does, for Jenson, determine his personal actuality. His eternal existence, even if it is in part determined by the future freedom of the Spirit, necessarily includes his life lived for the Father in the Spirit. In this sense, Jenson's notion of narrative causality would imply the coinherence and mutual determination of the three poles of time. Jenson's overall argument leans in this direction, while his explicit description of Christ's pre-existence leans in the former direction towards an exclusive efficacy of the future.

This ambiguous notion of God's being as the infinity of the triune life partially explains Jesus Christ's eternal existence. It offers a conceptually difficult, but logically consistent explanation of how this one person is with God in the beginning

⁸ ST I, 143-4.

as God.⁹ However, it does not explain his pre-existence in created time, nor does it explain one aspect of his eternal generation from the Father. To describe both Jenson looks to the Old Testament where he finds an incarnate pre-figuration of Christ's existence in Israel's life with God.¹⁰ God the Father is identified by and with his life with Israel. This means that this created other stands in relation to the Father as one by and with whom God is God. If this is the case, then there is a relation of distinction and unity that is actual in God's life with Israel that anticipates the Father's relation to his Son. Moreover, there are the *persona dramatis dei* that function in God's relation to Israel to mediate this relation between God and Israel. Because of this 'narrative pattern' Jenson recognizes that there is a role for the Son in Israel's history before his birth to Mary.

Jenson suggests in response to this that there is a movement towards incarnation in the Son's life. This is the case because God the Son is identified by and with this one history that includes these pre-figurations and the actual Incarnation. Recognizing this pre-existence *in* created time Jenson concludes 'there is a birth of the Logos as God that enables and therefore must be somehow antecedent to his birth as man.'¹¹ He even recognizes that 'there must be in God's eternity...a way in which the one Jesus Christ as God precedes himself as man.'¹² Although Jenson notes this way in which the Old Testament points to the pre-existence of Christ to himself in created time and a birth from the Father before creation he fails to accommodate this witness to Christ's life with the Father. Despite the suggestion that there is a movement in the triune life or a pattern of 'being going to be born to Mary,' he fails to specify this as the generation of the Son before all worlds. In sum, Jenson recognizes that the actual person of the biblical narrative is his pre-supposition in eternity. He also recognizes that this person's life from birth to death constitutes his personal actuality. Moreover, he recognizes that this person's life includes pre-existence in created time. However, Jenson fails to accommodate the complexity of this history in his description of the Son due to the emphasis he places on the priority

⁹ George Hunsinger, 'Robert Jenson's Systematic Theology: a review essay,' *Scottish Journal of Theology* vol. 55, no. 2, 171, is in a sense wrong to assert that 'for Jenson, the Son enjoys no antecedent reality prior to his coming into being, prior to the creation of the world.' Jenson tries to make accommodation for this prior actuality, even if not successfully.

¹⁰ See *ST* I, 141 for the following.

¹¹ *ST* I, 141.

¹² *Ibid.*

of the future. In the end his discussion of the Son's pre-existence in created time is not integrated into his discussion of the Son's eternal existence.

The Son is active and present to Israel before the Incarnation. Likewise this activity before the Son's birth to Mary identifies a movement before this birth that corresponds to his eternal generation. However, it must be concluded that Jenson's description of Jesus' place in the triune life through his resurrection fails to make either clear. His interpretation of the Resurrection could mean that this movement in God's life is confirmed and determined by the Resurrection or is exclusively determined by the Resurrection. In sum, it is hard to hold onto a birth of the Logos as a birth of Jesus Christ before creation if the Resurrection is ultimately described as the Son's only birth in and into the Spirit. If the Resurrection is described as the one and only decision of the Father that generates the Son, then the complexity of the Son's life with the Father as it is described in the biblical narrative is confused.

This difficulty is indicated by Jenson's initial observation about election and the life of the Son. The decision that there be a created history and the life of the Son in that history would seem to fall before creation. If this is the case, and God's being is perfect in unbounded anticipation of his future, then the decision of the Father that is the Son's generation would logically be before the Resurrection or Incarnation. This would imply that the decision of the Father about the Son is at the least two-fold.¹³ The Father decides what will be and is before creation and then confirms this in his faithfulness to his one Son. These distinct decisions are one in their unity of the Father's person, but distinct in their temporal factuality. The Father's decision to raise this Son from the dead is a determination about who he is as Father, but it is also a confirmation of his initial decision to have a Son, who would be in the history of creation. The Father decides to have this Son and to be with this Son in the perfection of his being-in-anticipation. He also decides that this Son who dies for sinners is his and so lives after death.

The actuality of both of these decisions must be affirmed without confusing the two. The Son exists in and through the Father's decisions, including the decision before creation. This aspect of the Son's life in eternity before creation remains unclear though as Jenson resists any direct description of the Son before his birth to

¹³ Unless the Father's decisions are atemporal and so eternal in a sense of being equally present to all times in creation. This traditional conception of eternal decisions is obviously not one that Jenson could accept.

Mary. Ultimately, there is a systematic ambiguity to Jenson's description of the Son's place in the triune life that is caused by an overly creative description of the priority of the future. The Son's historical existence with the Father determines the Father's personal actuality and the Son's existence. To describe this one and the same person, Jesus Christ, as God with God before creation does not diminish this, even if it makes it more complicated.

II.2 A Critical Omission and the Consequent Implication

To make Jenson's inadequate description of the Son patent, it is essential to look at the New Testament's witness to Christ's *life* with the Father before creation. We will depend on a critic of Jenson's, the self-described *Neutestamentler*, Simon Gathercole to do this directly and briefly.¹⁴ In his critique of Jenson Gathercole draws attention to six elements of the canonical witness to Christ's pre-existence, four consist of data and two of general observations.

Gathercole begins and immediately notes the clarity and complexity of John's witness to Jesus Christ's existence with the Father in the beginning. Central to this complexity are the distinctive statements on the lips of Jesus that he shares 'the glory of God before the world was,' and that 'before Abraham was, I am.'¹⁵ Gathercole rightly places Jesus' odd claims in relation to the prologue's clear affirmation that the Word was in the beginning with God as God. Gathercole's conclusion is apt and nicely relates this witness to the 'data' of the Apocalypse; he suggests that 'the Logos is, like the Father, *Alpha* as well as *Omega*.'¹⁶

The second element that Gathercole describes is the pervasive witness to Christ's agency in the act of creating. This is specifically related to the common notion that 'all things came into being through him.' These themes and specific statements occur in Paul, John, and the letter to the Hebrews. Gathercole highlights the unique contribution of Hebrews where, in chapter 1, the writer 'interpret[s] the

¹⁴ Simon Gathercole, 'Pre-existence, and the Freedom of the Son in Creation and Redemption: An Exposition in Dialogue with Robert Jenson,' *International Journal of Systematic Theology* vol. 7 no. 1 (2005), 39. Hereafter abbreviated, *Gathercole*, and page.

¹⁵ John 6:62, 'What if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before?' also implies that this incarnate Son was with the Father before creation.

¹⁶ *Gathercole*, 39

address of Psalm 102:25-28 to the Lord who 'established the earth and made the heavens' as an address of God to Christ.'¹⁷ This one who is spoken by the Father in this last age, who bears all things in his power, is active with the Father in the act of creation; all things came into being through him. As is clear in Hebrews, each witness asserts that the agency of Christ with the Father is essential to the act of Creation. In light of this, we must describe this Son as present and active with the Father before creation.

These two elements lead to Gathercole's first general conclusion: 'pre-existence in the New Testament is real and personal, because it is invariably the case that the person of Jesus Christ defines the 'that' and the 'how' of pre-existence.'¹⁸ In effect, the New Testament witness is clear *that* Jesus Christ, the one and the same who is born, crucified and buried, exists with the Father before creation. The New Testament is also clear that he does so as an active person, as God the Logos who creates heaven and earth. Jesus the Son sustains and mediates the space that is actual in which creatures live move and have their being, but he-not a *logos asarkos*- is also active in bringing about this world.

The third element that Gathercole notes is Christ's pre-existence in created time. This pre-existence is mysteriously alluded to by Paul in his description of Christ as the rock that accompanies Israel in their wilderness wanderings.¹⁹ More direct is the assertion that immediately follows this, namely, that Christ is the one against whom the Israelites complained and so the one whom they tested in their disbelief and disobedience.²⁰ This type of re-reading of the Old Testament is also present in John 12:41. Commenting on this, Gathercole explains that 'the reference [to Isaiah seeing Jesus' glory] is clearly to Isaiah's vision of God in Isaiah 6, identified by the evangelist as a vision of Christ.'²¹ Taking this seriously, we must

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ *Gathercole*, 42; Gathercole clarifies that 'as the New Testament identifies the risen and exalted Lord with the Jesus who was, born, lived and died, so also the New Testament identifies this one who was put to death and exalted with the one through whom all things were made. In other words, it is not the case that there is a pre-existent entity which in a secondary sense is personal in Jesus Christ.' (Ibid)

¹⁹ I Corinthians 10:4.

²⁰ I Corinthians 10:9. Gathercole notes that this reading of 10:9 is contested, but suggests that the textual evidence is in favor of reading Christ, not Lord.

²¹ *Gathercole*, 41. Raymond Brown, *The Gospel According to John* (New York: Doubleday, 1966), vol. I, 486-87, concurs that this verse recalls Isaiah's vision of the Lord on his throne. This is made all the more interesting, as Brown notes, because

accommodate the fact that Israel prefigures the incarnate Son, but is also encountered by this same incarnate Son.

The fourth element is, according to Gathercole, the crucial one that reveals the basis for the Incarnation. Citing 2 Corinthians 8:9 and Philippians 2:6-11, Gathercole suggests that the free action of the Son before the creation of the world reveals his co-ordination with the Father's will and his initiative in the Father's sending. More concretely, the transition from the form of God to the form of the servant described in Philippians is 'not something that happens to the Son, but which comes about by the very action of the Son himself. The 'emptied himself'...is an action whereby the Son freely determines his being in the incarnation.'²² Gathercole's basic point is essential: Jesus Christ has a decision to make before creation that is essential to who he is as God.

If we take this witness to Christ's life as proper description of Christ, then it is clear that there is a choice made by the Son in response to the Father before creation. Jesus Christ is present and active as he makes a choice about the Father's choosing before creation, not after and somehow 'before' creation. This decision is an essential part of who Jesus Christ is and what he does. This aspect of the Son's free willing in response to the Father offers crucial insight into the nature of Incarnation and Jesus Christ's life with his Father. The Son is pre-existent not only through the decision of the Father and the power of the Spirit, but as a person who is active with the Father before creation. The triune life is infinite in that this decision of the Son is not separate from the decision in created time that Jenson so clearly describes. However, this decision before all ages is not made by the Son who has been crucified and raised, but by the Son who will be in the form of a slave for our salvation.

both the MT and LXX are clear that Isaiah sees the Lord, and not only the glory of the Lord. The complexity of the matter is only intensified in 12: 43 by the evangelist and the ironic contrast between loving man's glory and God's.

²² Gathercole, 41. Karl Barth makes the point that he humbled himself and quotes Kierkegaard to illustrate: 'Christ humbled *himself-not*, he *was* humbled. O infinite sublimity, of which it must categorically be true that there was *not* in heaven or on earth or in the abyss that could humble him! He humbled himself. The infinite qualitative difference between Christ and every other man lies indeed in this, that in every humiliation which he suffers it is absolutely necessary that he himself should assent and confirm that he is willing to submit to that humiliation.' (Tegebuecher, ed Haecker II, 122) quoted by Karl Barth, *Epistle to the Philippians* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 64.

Given the ambiguity of Jenson's description of the Son's pre-existence and the clarity of the canonical witness regarding the agency of Jesus Christ prior to creation, in the act of creation, and in creation prior to the Incarnation, it must be concluded that Jenson's creative construction is problematic. Ultimately, Jenson's suggestion that the Resurrection is the only way that the Son participates in the Father's eternity through his Spirit truncates scripture's description of Jesus' life with the Father in the Spirit. In effect, it overlooks the truth that Christ is exalted to a place that corresponds to his reality in creation *and before* creation.

I would suggest that this happens because of the way that Jenson construes the dialectic between eternity and time as a particular type of temporal dialectic. When Jenson correlates the Father, Son, and Spirit to the Past-Present-Future scheme the eternity of God is described as a pure duration that is distinct from and in relation with created time. This attempt rightly focuses on the temporal actuality of the triune life but wrongly construes this as the supra-temporal mutuality of the persons. This has the impact of situating Jesus as a moment in a temporal sequence, whereas his life, as it is described in the New Testament, is a history that includes agency before, in and after creation. Although Jenson rightly identifies Jesus Christ as the one Son and Word of the Father, his description of this Son fails to incorporate the oddity of the canonical witness to this one person's *life*. In his attempt to clarify the historical actuality of the one Son's life and its determinative significance for who God is and how the triune God is, Jenson appears to resist the canonical witness to the Son's life. Specifically, he obscures the actuality of the Son's existence with the Father. Jenson is right that Jesus Christ is the one Son and word of the Father. Moreover, it is necessary to accommodate his agency and personal actuality with the Father before creation in a way that doesn't separate the Son's eternity and temporal actuality. Before we develop this line of thought further, it is necessary to ask how this inadequate description of Jesus Christ affects Jenson's description of Jesus' Father and their Spirit.

III. Two Related Re-Descriptions

This critique of Jenson makes it clear that he fails to describe fully the life of Jesus Christ. This is the case because he limits the activity of the Son to the created present even as he makes conceptual accommodation for the hypostatic actuality of the Son in God's eternity. In this critique we noted that Jenson rightly describes the Resurrection of Jesus as his exaltation into God's eschatological Kingdom, but argued that this exaltation is misconstrued as the only witness to the Son's reality in eternity. Additionally, it was suggested Jenson's use of the Past-Present-Future scheme limits this person's eternal actuality to certain moments in a sequential temporality. Given this critique, it is essential to identify and describe any corresponding inadequacies in his descriptions of the Father and the Spirit. Because the lack of proper Christological description is related to these problems, the critique of Jenson's patrological and pneumatological identifications will be at once more direct and concise.

III.1 Re-describing the Father as the One God

Jenson's description of the Father as the one God and one person of God acknowledges and appropriates two aspects of scripture's witness that are essential and essentially difficult to relate. This canonical oddity leads Jenson to a revised notion of the Monarchy of the Father. Jenson describes the Father as the Monarch of the triune community and as a person who is the unifying agent of the triune communion. Additionally and crucially, Jenson clarifies that the Father is a person that exists in and only in his relation with the Son and Spirit. The way in which Jenson works this out by noting the double dynamics of prayer that correspond to the double identification of the Father is creative. In effect, it is a creative resolution to the difficulty of describing the personal diversity and essential unity of the triune community. While elucidating Jenson's description of the Father, it was noted that Jenson accommodates both aspects of scripture's witness to the Father without abstracting from the Father, Son, and Spirit's self-revelation.

Jenson's description of the Father is insightful and essential. As was noted in relation to Ephesians 1:3-4 Jenson rightly identifies the Father as the one God. The Father is the one God who elects his people before the foundation of the world in the predestination of Jesus Christ. In this context the Father is properly called God and is described as the antecedent chooser whose freedom in his action is the ground of our

gracious salvation. The choice of the Father is the contingency of God's freedom in relation to his people, in relation to creation, and in relation to the one beloved Son, who dies to redeem his brother and sisters. This noted, the description of the Father as the '*sole* antecedent chooser' becomes problematic when it is related to the scheme of temporal succession. Again, when Jenson describes the Father as the Past of God, certain aspects of the Father's personal actuality are obscured as one temporal aspect is made absolute. Specifically, Jenson's conceptual scheme and related trinitarian description obscure the Father's personal actuality as the *Omega* of creation.

Paul describes the Father's personal particularity in 1 Corinthians 8:6 as the one from whom and *for* whom all things are. This description is more direct in Revelation 1:8 when the Almighty and everlasting Lord God is described as both Alpha and Omega. More specific yet are the numerous descriptions of the Old Testament that both these descriptions pick up and reinterpret in light of- or in anticipation of- Christ's unity with the one God.²³ Finally, the first chapter of Hebrews displays the teleological actuality of the Father when the Son's exaltation is described. The one Son and Word, who is spoken by the Father in this last age, is worshiped and glorified because he made sacrifice and was exalted to the right hand of the Father. He was seated next to the Father in his resurrection and so is raised to be with the Father who rules over the past and future. In other words, the Son comes from and goes to the Father, who is the Alpha and Omega.

Like the Son, the Father is unbounded lively and so free to be himself in the history that he chooses and lives with the Son and the Spirit. This person in his hypostatic particularity is identified as the origin of all things, but not as an origin that is specifically located in the past of the divine duration. The Father is transcendent over creation and the Spirit is the actuality of this in his self-determination beyond his individual personal singularity. However, this is not because the future of the Spirit is unified to the Father's eternal actuality as the past. Again, like Jesus Christ, the Father is the one God who is active in God's everlasting past, in his present, and in his future. The Father is active in creation with and in the Son and with and in his Spirit. He is not exalted above and beyond creation, nor does his personal distinctiveness limit him to God's pre-creation past. The Father is the Monarch of deity and the source of all things, but is so as he actively rules over all things with the

²³ For example see Isaiah 48:12 or 44:6.

Son and Spirit; he is God with God and so is active in creation as he identifies by and with his people and by and with contingent events. The Father is the one God who chooses to be in communion with his people with and through his beloved, Jesus Christ. However, he is not the sole antecedent chooser in this self-determining decision. Instead, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ makes this decision as he makes all his choices- in the perfect mutuality of his communion with the Son in the Spirit. To more fully describe this person's particularity and eternal actuality, we can accommodate much of Jenson's trinitarian description but we must move beyond the way he limits the Father's mutual action with the Son in the Spirit.

III.2 Re-describing the Spirit as the Dependent Spirit

Jenson's identification of the Spirit holds together two essential descriptions of the Spirit that are mandated by the canonical witness. The first is that the Spirit is always and only the Spirit of someone. The second essential affirmation is that the Spirit is a person of God and a personal agent that we can speak to, invoke, and expect to act in relation to and in distinction from the Father and the Son. In the chapter on Jenson's identification of the Spirit it was argued that Jenson accommodates both of these truths because he appropriates and carefully uses a set of distinctions developed by the Cappadocians. This distinction between the *ousia*, *hypostasis* and the *energeia* of God allows Jenson to describe the procession of the Spirit from the Father, his essential unity with the Son and his particular agency. He does this without separating the triune God from his acts in and for creation. Moreover, Jenson's appropriate inclusion of the Spirit's personal particularity as the life-giving and perfecting power of God is essential.

However, when Jenson makes the move to argue that it is as the future that the Spirit stands over and against the Father and the Son there is a tendency to modulate the dependant aspect of his eternal reality. In some cases this is not true; especially, where Jenson interprets the way in which Jesus Christ's life and death determine the character of the future which the Spirit is in God's life.²⁴ At these points Jenson maintains the proper insight that the hypostases of God are themselves in and only in their giving and receiving of themselves in relation to the other two persons of God.

²⁴ For example, see *ST I*, 219.

The Spirit is and only is the Spirit of God, or, in this context the Spirit of Christ. However, when Jenson's identification becomes more abstract the Spirit is at times described in individualistic terms. If the Spirit is the future of God in himself and by himself, then there is a problem as the future becomes an unknown entity that is given in separation from Christ's love.

As was the case in our criticism of Jenson's christology and patrology, this criticism of Jenson's pneumatology highlights the way in which Jenson modulates the mutuality of the persons when he moves to conceptual description of God's eternity. Just as the Son is active in God's free creation of the world, the Spirit was active in this aspect of God's history. Moreover, the Spirit was active in the begetting of the Son, a point which Jenson elucidates with special care and strength. If we accept that this begetting of the Son is before all worlds, then it follows that the Spirit is active, present and so identified by and with God's past and present. This given we can and must say that the Spirit, like the Father and Son, is identified by and with a past, present and future that is actual before, in and after creation. The Spirit is active in a unique way that correlates to the future of God, but not in such a way that God's past and present are actual for this person in the perichoresis of the persons. Instead, the Spirit is the Spirit of the Father and the Son who acts with and in these two persons. He does so when he draws them forward, moving them out and so towards the future that the Father chooses to have and be with his Son.

III.3 The Critical, and Compromised, Insight

Robert Jenson's trinitarian description and theological ontology depend on a strong notion of mutuality. I argued in the first chapter that this basic insight leads to the critique of Augustinian trinitarianism where an inflexible conception of ontological identity confuses trinitarian description. In turn, Jenson's notion of mutuality allows for the development of a framework that can include mutual dependence and radical personal distinction. Triune mutuality is the conceptual pivot that allows Jenson to describe the Father as God, the two natures of Christ, and the personal particularity of the Spirit. Finally, it was argued that Jenson's theological ontology clarifies this insofar as he suggests that God's being is the act of perfect mutuality in which the Father, Son, and Spirit give and receive from each other. Central to each of these discussions and the argument as a whole is the insight that the mutuality of the

persons is the ground of their unity, their perfect willing and action, and so their infinite communion. The persons are joint possessors of the one divine nature because they live the one infinite life of love, faithfulness and joy in perfect mutual relation and distinction. Their active relatedness reveals each other in characteristic deference and surprising action that is their mutually determined being *in se* and *pro nobis*. In this each person is distinctively different and so relates to the other two persons as they act and thereby constitute the divine *ousia*. This freedom to describe the persons in their radical distinction allows Jenson to appropriate the oddity of the canonical witness to each person and fruitfully engage the tradition. The end result is that Jenson makes a clarifying contribution to the conversation about the personal diversity and essential unity of the triune God.

At each point of the prior critique of Jenson's trinitarian description, it has been made clear that the complex nature of this mutuality is sacrificed when he shifts to speak of the Father, Son, and Spirit as the Past-Present-Future of the triune life. In his attempt to speak rightly of God's identification by and with temporal events, Jenson ultimately adopts a conceptual structure that obscures an essential aspect of the history that he previously describes. As a result, Jenson identifies God as three poles of time or three agents active in different aspects of a pure duration. Whereas Jenson described each person in their personal particularity as they are identified by and with each other and an aspect of temporality, his conceptual structuring results in an emphasis on the later aspect of a temporal sequence. This is done in such a way that the other person's reality in and through this whole history is obscured. Francis Watson makes this same criticism and suggests that 'while it is appropriate to correlate the three divine persons with the beginning, middle and end attested by the scriptural narrative, it must also be more clearly shown how all three persons stand at the beginning, middle and end.'²⁵ It is essential, in order to be more accurate in our trinitarian description and to witness to the mutuality of the persons as they are united in and through each aspect of God's temporal history with and for us. In sum, the perfectly mutual action of the triune God reveals a unity and mutual history that requires a more flexible notion of God's everlasting communion and choosing.

²⁵ Francis Watson, "America's Theologian": an appreciation of Robert Jenson's Systematic Theology,' *Scottish Journal of Theology* vol. 55 no. 2 (2002), 216.

IV. Programmatic Suggestions

To conclude, I shall address the question that was noted at the beginning of the last chapter: ‘How...can truth be considered simultaneously from the point of view of the “nature” of being... from the view of the goal or end of history..., and from the viewpoint of Christ, who is both a historical person and the permanent ground (the Logos) of being – and all the while preserving God’s “otherness” in relation to creation?’²⁶ This question seems necessary given the actuality of God’s free and self-determining mutual action before, in, and after created history. It also seems necessary given the prior description of Jesus Christ as the second person of God and an active agent in the creating, redeeming and judging of all things.

I will appropriate several of Jenson’s basic descriptions of the persons and being of God to develop two programmatic suggestions for continuing the conversation. For example, I shall speak of the three persons as God as joint possessors of the divine nature who live eternity in perfect mutuality. Additionally, I shall assume that God can and must be described as a person, event, and decision, which is best characterized as a conversation. In other words, my assumption will be that Jenson’s basic insight, namely, that the triune God is freely but truly identified by and with Jesus Christ, must be maintained. Given these assumptions, I shall argue that Jesus of Nazareth is the Truth as the person he is with the Father in the Spirit. He is the one who reveals the nature of created history and the history God is. This person-in-relation provides the proper perspective or paradigm for understanding the nature of God’s being, freedom, and relation to creation. This one and the same person, who is God and man, the creator and a creature, also preserves the otherness of God and the freedom of creation. We will begin with a few short reflections on this person.

IV.1 Moving Forward in the Light of Christ

Jesus Christ is the Word by, through, and for whom God creates all things.²⁷ He is the truth and the one in whom all the promises of God are yes and amen.²⁸ He is the

²⁶ Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 71-2.

²⁷ John 1:1, Colossians 1:15-17.

²⁸ John 14:6, II Corinthians 1:20.

holy other Lord who meets his people in judgement and gracious love. Scripture describes this one person in each of these temporally distinct roles as God and man. As an active agent in the act of creation, the messiah of God that redeems this same creation, and the judge of all things Jesus is before, in and after creation. At each turn of this history Jesus is a person who makes decisions that determine the nature of his relation to the Father and the nature of God's relation to all things.

If the triune God is one decision and many decisions that are perfect in the mutuality of the persons, then God the Son's actuality can be elucidated in light of these decisions. Jesus Christ is God with God as one person who makes decisions at each phase of this strange life. At each point this person responds to the Father's choosing as an agent in relation; he acts with the Father and Spirit in perfect love in and through God's eternity. More precisely, Jesus Christ is the second person of the Trinity in and through his responses to the Father that constitute his mutual perfection as God. These decisions occur in the form of God, in the form of a servant, and in the form of the judge of all things. He is himself in and through these temporally distinct decisions that are perfected in the Spirit; there is no other son who we know or could know than this one who is chosen to be God and is God with God.²⁹

If Jesus is the Son, then there is no Son who exists before the determination for Incarnation or in separation from the Incarnation and the Resurrection. This man who is God comes from God the Father, who as the initiator of the triune life chooses to be and be with this Son. Jesus Christ is the object of this election and an active electing subject in the triune God's self-determination. If he is a person in and through his decision before creation and his other acts of response to the Father, then He is himself in this temporally complex history. In this way of obedience Jesus is the

²⁹ N.T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991) chapter 4, argues that the one who makes this decision is latterly known as Jesus Christ. He illustrates the point with reference to Ronald Reagan; he suggests that the true statement that the president made cowboy movies does not imply that the one who made cowboy movies was at that time the President. This could be developed in several ways. I will not develop the possibility that this is loose language that only indirectly describes the person Jesus. It is not the case that Christ's incarnate state is just a phase of the life of the Logos; Jesus is not a title given to the person of the Son, as is the case with the title 'president.' This is one of the traditional views of Christ's pre-existence that translates 'the concrete language of religion into the cool and rationale language of the schools.' See H.R. Macintosh, *The Doctrine of The Person of Jesus Christ* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1913), 457, for this specific contrast of concrete and rationale modes of predication.

subject of the divine choosing that determines all things. In addition, He is the object of the Father's choosing. Moreover, he is the one with whom the Spirit perfects all things in the choosing of God that frees created being to be other than God.

Bruce McCormack has suggested that any description of Jesus as the subject and object of election implies two things: first, that there is no Son other than Jesus; and, second, that the decision of God for Incarnation is equivocal with the generation of the Son and the procession of the Spirit. His conclusion elucidates the consequences of this suggestion:

‘the works of God *ad intra* (the trinitarian processions) find their ground in the *first* of the works of God *ad extra* (viz. election). And that also means that eternal generation and eternal procession are willed by God; they are not natural to him if ‘natural’ is taken to mean a determination of being fixed in advance of all actions and relations.’³⁰

When this suggestion is paired with this prior identification of the Son, it is implied that God's immanent being is determined in the decision of the Father for incarnation and the decisions of the Son in his incarnate actuality. It also implies that the triune being of God is determined in this work that begins in the Father, is actual through the Son, and perfected in the Spirit. In other words, God the Father chooses for the man Jesus to be the Son and this man is so as the one person who participates in two sets of relationships or unites and distinguishes the two natures. His acts of being are internal to God's being even as they move beyond the community of God to constitute the community that is the people of God. The movement of the triune life is the reality of this choice that begins with the Father, is actual throughout the Son's strange history, and is perfected in the Spirit. This movement graciously, but naturally, opens to other reality without obliterating other things or panentheistically enfolding other reality. This distinction in relation is possible because the Father freely chooses to have this Son and have all other things through this Son's creative and redemptive agency. The immanent Trinity is active before creation and is creative as a community of perfect love. And yet, this community is the community of the three persons who exist as God *pro nobis*. There is no life of God or triune community other than this freely chosen life that is completed in the Son's action with the Father and Spirit.

³⁰ *Grace and Being*, 103.

This suggestive description of the Son tries to accommodate two things: first, Jenson's insight that Jesus Christ, the incarnate, crucified and risen Son, is God with God as the one by and with whom the Father is freely and finally identified; and, second, the canonical witness that this one and the same person created all things with the Father and Spirit. Jesus Christ's three-fold history is strange but is somehow his history that is internal to his person and the one God's being. He is God as the one who lives this life with the Father and Spirit for and with humanity.

Several of Barth's specific suggestions make clear what can and must be said about God's being that is revealed in and through this Son's existence. First, Barth recognizes that the free act of Christ is the key to the logic of God's electing freedom and gracious being. He explains that 'everything that claims to be exaltation and divinity is to be tested by whether it is identical or not with the free love disclosed in its reality in the *tapeivophrosyne* of Jesus Christ.'³¹ In other words, the limits and content of our trinitarian description and theological ontology are set by the life and love of Christ. This is the case because his history is identical with the humility and glory of God and the reality of God. This person reveals what is good, true and beautiful in the triune community as God with God in the self-determining outward movement of love.

Jesus Christ is God with God. His personal actuality is inseparable from his humiliation, his exaltation and his gracious self-determination. Moreover, the actuality of the Father and Spirit's existence is inseparable from this life or from this happening. A second suggestion of Barth's is particularly relevant at this point; discussing the triune God's freely chosen life he explains 'this happening is simply God himself, His free life, in which He is inexhaustible, untiring, [and] incapable of being diverted from His purpose.'³² The perfection of God's will and nature is the triune community's sovereignty to be and do this thing. Within this happening Jesus Christ is trans-formed without compromising the immutable nature of God. In this transformation Jesus Christ is God as the Son in perfect relation to the Father. At one and the same time this person becomes a constitutive member of the community who is not God. Jesus Christ is free in the love of the Father and as the love of God to do this. He is God in relation to the Father in the Spirit and God in relation to his faithless brothers and sisters. The Son's existence is completed and his end made real

³¹ CD II/1, 517.

³² CD II/1, 515.

in this event of condescension that leads to his death and humanity's redemption. This simply is God acting with God and in God in the freedom and perfection of mutually determining love.

Again, Barth is helpful as he cogently expresses the implication of this relative to God's being and freedom; he explains that

this means that so far from being contrary to the nature of God, it is of His essence to possess the freedom to be capable of this self-offering and self-concealment, and beyond this to make use of this freedom, and therefore really to effect this self-offering and to give Himself up to this self-concealment.³³

Jesus Christ is, in this single act, one person of God as the Son who acts in obedience to the Father. He acts in response to the Father's initiating decision once and again and again. In this he fulfils the command to live in love, to be constantly dependent on the Spirit, and so be God with the Father. This ruling and thinking and living is the point at which we see the perfect existence and life of the Son. This life has its origin in the Father, has an end in the cross, and a new beginning in the Resurrection. Just as this one is with the Father in the act of electing that determines the end of creation, he is with the Father in all of his acts of redemption that recapitulate that same creation to an end of glory. His existence is actual in the capacity and in the act of self-emptying that freely constitutes his person.

Where does this leave us? It leaves us with the triune decision made about Christ and by Jesus Christ before creation that is inseparable from the Incarnation. This choice of Christ occurs before the creation of the world in response to the distinctly different choice of the Father. Jesus can respond to the Father because he is spoken as the word of the Father before the foundation of the world. Likewise, the Son of Mary can act with and for the Father in the creation of the world. In other words, Jesus Christ is begotten as the saviour of the world and as the Son who will come into the world he creates. In both aspects of this one life he exists in perfect communion with the Father through the Spirit. Within this life he lives without grasping for equality with God or the identical repetition of the Father's existence. As this self-giving and deferential person Jesus is the Alpha and the Omega and the second person of the Trinity. He is the Son who is God and who as God mediates all things to the Father as their high priest and Lord. To know this one and the same person is to know God in the object through which God the Father is himself and

³³ Ibid.

knows himself. In the light of this knowledge it is possible to speak directly about who God is and how God is.³⁴ In the next two sections I will offer two examples of what this might look like.

IV.2 The Eternity of God

What effect does this expanded description of the strange life of Jesus Christ have on the doctrine of the Trinity? Most immediately, this description should change the way we think of the eternity and freedom of God. To develop programmatic descriptions of each, I will continue to work with some of Jenson's basic notions while developing them to my own ends. For Jenson, the substance of all trinitarian teaching is the one God's history. The one life of the Father, Son, and Spirit graciously opens to us and calls forth worship, confession, and direct description of the persons and being of God. The doctrine of the Trinity, as Jenson uses it in this way, demands that these three persons are identified as the one God. Therefore, beyond or above or behind these three there is no other God, no other divine being or life that is distinct from their relations and their action. To know God we must therefore attend to the action of the persons who reveal each other in perfect mutuality. We must listen to the gospels and the one biblical narrative and hear the Father speaking in his Word. We must listen to these same stories and hear Jesus Christ speaking in the power of the Spirit while making the Father known. And finally, we must listen to these stories to

³⁴ A final and brief contrast between Barth and Jenson is clarifying at this point. As I have made clear from the beginning, Jenson believes that God is an object for us in Christ and in the life of the Church; the primary objectivity of God with and for us leads to a sacramental objectivity that is dependant on the prior presence of God. In contrast, Barth describes a double objectivity defined by a pervasive indirectness that is characteristic of our knowledge in faith. He explains, *C.D.* 2/1, 16, that 'God is objectively immediate to Himself, but to us He is objectively mediate...He is not objective directly but indirectly, not in the naked sense but clothed under the sign and veil of other objects different from Himself.' He continues and explains that 'it is in with and under the sign and veil of these other objects that we believe in God, and know Him and pray to Him.' Both recognize that secondary objectivity depends on primary. However, Barth, *C.D.* 2/1, 54, suggests that 'the humanity of Jesus Christ as such is the first sacrament, the foundation of everything that God instituted and used in His revelation as a secondary objectivity both before and after the epiphany of Jesus Christ.' Ironically, Barth seems to fall prey to a subtle anthropocentrism in which our present knowledge of God, which is always mediated knowledge, controls description of what is possible and actual in the primal event of revelation.

know the Spirit as the freedom and love that enlivens the action of the Father and Son.

Having initially identified these three as God, it is then possible to ask about the eternity of the triune community's life. Again, we can accept Jenson's suggestion that to do so we must attend to the Resurrection as the event in and through which the one God confirms and determines his relation to the Son. However, as our previous critique made clear, this confirmation must include the explicit affirmation that the Son was with God in the beginning before creation. The Resurrection determines the future of God, but does so as the dramatic completion of God's past. To make this clear it is appropriate to ask about how the Father, Son, and Spirit live eternally. But this can be done only as we ask about the eternity of each person and then grasp the unity of this infinite communion. In this context we will begin with the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Father is properly identified as one person of God and the one God. As such, his eternity is the everlasting nature of his willing or the perfection of his self-determination in Christ.³⁵ Although we critiqued Jenson's notion of the Father as the *sole* antecedent chooser, it is necessary to affirm with Jenson that the Father's eternity is bound up with the way he chooses to be the Father and so generates the Son and breathes the Spirit. The Father's personal actuality in eternity is the everlasting effectiveness of this choice. In this the Father gives and receives. He gives being and existence to the Son who in turn lives through the Spirit. In this the Son determines the end of all things that come from and for the Father. Consequently, the Father is eternal in that his choice to have this Son is completed in life of the Son and in his own decision to raise this Son to be the end of all things. The Father is free in all these decisions as he is freed by the Spirit. The Spirit frees the Father to have this Son who is a human person who lives and dies in solidarity with sinners. The mystery of this unity reveals the depths of the Father's love and the infinity of his intention. In other words, his decision in the triune life before creation and his decision on Easter Sunday are the perfection of his personhood as the source of all love; the Father is eternal in that he overcomes death as the Father who loves his crucified and risen Son. These decisions of the Father determine and confirm the eternity of the Father as they

³⁵ See, *ST I*, 220.

constitute the character of what will be in his future kingdom where he is worshiped with the Son as the Father and as God.

The Son of the Father is Jesus Christ. Both in the confession and in the canonical witness the oddity of this is never confused. This one and the same created all things visible and invisible with the Father and becomes man. Jesus Christ is the perfect Word of God's loving kindness who is spoken and who speaks in response to the Father's ecstatic love. The eternity of the Son is the inexhaustibility of these acts that cohere to witness to the past, present and future of God. If Jesus Christ is God, then God's eternity is not equivalent to mere timelessness. Instead, God's time is the perfection of this life as it is from the Father, actual in obedience, and perfected in the Spirit. Jesus Christ is God as this one who lives with the Father before Adam's death, in the obedience to the point of death, and lives now as the Son who brings his brother and sisters to his Father beyond their death. This last possibility reveals the great mercy of God as he enters into creation and meets his creatures' end. This given, we can say that this life reveals the mutual perfection and eventful actuality of the one God before, in and after created history; Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ of Israel, is the Logos in God's time and in created time. He is eternal as the Truth that is spoken by the Father and enlivened by the Spirit. This one and the same is the Logos who acts with the Father and Spirit before created time, in created time and beyond created time. He is the one who makes concrete or tangible the triune God's relation to and distinction from God's people and created history.

Finally, we can and must say with Jenson that the Spirit is the power of God's future. The Spirit proceeds from the Father in anticipation of his perfect life with the Son. This future of the Father with and in the Son is real for God and yet is not separated from the past or present of God's life. God's life is a pure duration because the Father's Spirit is perfectly related to the Father and so brings what will be to the Father who is with his Son. In this life there is an end that is freely chosen and perfectly anticipated, which is distinct and different from God's beginning. We can therefore describe the eternal life of God's Spirit as his creative empowering of all things as they are moved towards their end with God. In this perfecting action the Spirit comes from the Father and works with and in the Son to create, renew and perfect created life. Central to this is the Spirit's life with the Son who lives with and for God in created time as God. In addition, the Spirit lives with and in the Son's people in anticipation of their end in and with the Father. Moreover, the Spirit lives in

the perfection of the Kingdom when and where the Son's body is no longer in need of perfection. In light of these distinct roles it is plausible to say that the Spirit's eternity is the perfect *ecstasis* of God that perfects the triune life and created life in and through time. In other words, the Spirit unites the Father and Son in the past, present and future of their life. Additionally, the Spirit enlivens the people of God in anticipation of their end with God and so overcomes the brokenness of the church's existence in created time. As such, the dependent and relative aspect of the Spirit is actual in all of his life as the Spirit of the Father, the Son and the Son's people.

What then, of God's eternity? God's eternity is the everlasting communion of the persons of God. This infinite communion is a pure duration that is distinct from created time. The qualitative difference between the holiness of eternity and the brokenness of created time is revealed and determined by Jesus Christ's life. This one embodies the love of the Father before, in and after created history. Although all created things wear out as they are worn down by sin, the life of the triune God is perfect in the holiness and faithfulness of the Father's intention, the Son's obedience, and the Spirit's perfecting power. What ever else might have been, these three are God. This God promises to renew all things in the love revealed in the Resurrection that graciously completes a chosen past. The Logos of this history and the revelation of true being is Jesus Christ, the one Son of the Father and the Lord of all creation. His existence is inseparable from his contingent actuality with and for us that is freely chosen by the triune God before created history and is freely chosen again in the Resurrection. The unity and perfection of this gracious intention is the eternity of the persons who are God.

IV.3 The Freedom of God

What then, should we say in conclusion regarding the freedom of the triune God? Here we will start with the Spirit. Jenson describes the Spirit as the freedom of God because the Spirit is the future of God and the perfection of his being-in-anticipation. He also describes the Spirit as the freedom of the relations that occur in the history that God is. It is critical to expand this last suggestion to include the surprising way that the Spirit unifies creaturely freedom with God's intention while remaining distinct from creatures.

How does the Spirit act with and in the body of Christ to free creatures in anticipation of their completion in Christ? Jenson makes the essential point: the Spirit brings creatures into the triune life and directs them to someone other than himself.³⁶ In other words, the Spirit brings creatures into a community that is perfectly loving, personal, and 'roomy.' In this way the Spirit is free as the Spirit of God, Christ, and the church. This one invades, redirects and remains free in relation to the church while enabling the freedom of those who are gathered to be the church. Again, the Spirit dwells in the temple of the Lord, that is, namely, the church, and yet is the Spirit of God and Christ and so is free in his Lordly presence as the *Holy* Spirit. In other words, the Spirit transforms Christ's broken and fallen body into what it will be and so is. In and through this infinitely surprising action the Spirit remains beyond our control and yet is intimately present as another advocate. As a result, the Spirit maintains the elusive divide between the church and the world and the distinction between the holy God and his wholly dependant people. The Spirit is perfectly personal and perfectly holy and is therefore capable of uniting and distinguishing other persons in relation.

Next we can consider Christ. Again, Jenson is helpful as he makes it clear that Jesus' freedom is his perfect obedience in the Spirit to the Father. Jesus of Nazareth, the divine and human person, is free therefore as he comes from the Father and lives in obedience to the Father in hope of the Father's faithfulness. In this knowledge and in this hope Jesus prays to the Father knowing that God alone is good, that his love is steadfast, and that he is the God of the living not the dead. In the hard won knowledge of this last truth Jesus is perfected as the Son who is free for others in God's eternity. Jesus' freedom is the freedom of pure love for God and for his neighbour that fulfils the law and the prophets.

Just as Jesus is free in obeying the Father and his law, he speaks the law as a man to other men. In other words, he speaks divine things as a man, while rendering human obedience as God. In this double agency the Son is free to be identified by and with his brothers and free to maintain the distinction between the holy God and his disobedient people. The freedom of the Son is the joy of loving the Father in the Spirit and the graciousness of loving those to whom the Father sends him in the Spirit. This immodest love is foolishness to the Greeks and folly to God's people whose will

³⁶ *ST* II, 11, 26.

persists in self-protection; it is love that blinds those who claim to see and opens the eyes of those who know that God is hidden by their sinfulness. In the hidden character of this moral intention the Son reveals that he is in and from the Father as the perfect word that contradicts and silences all our chaotic words of self-description and self-positing. As this Word, who calls himself our brother and is declared to be the Lord by his resurrection, this one and the same Son, Jesus Christ, is God. This one and the same is actual and free as the love that surpasses all earthly description and limitation.³⁷ The freedom of the Son is the unbounded and unlimited graciousness of perfectly spoken and responding love.

Finally, we may describe the freedom of God the Father. Again, we can appropriate Jenson's insight that the freedom of God and the freedom of the Father is identical with the contingency of his free choice. As the personalizing person of God, the Father is the Monarch of the Trinity and the initiating God. He is the one who chooses that there be a Son and a created history in which that Son's love is actual as perfect self-giving. Beyond this choice that is revealed in the Son there is no perception or transcendence. At this point it is proper to quote Jenson at length:

Thus there is a Source of all being that neither we nor yet God himself can get behind, for reasons or other explanations; and that is the Father merely as Father...one cannot question one's way back behind the fact of the Father's Fatherhood.³⁸

What must be made more explicit is that the Father's free choosing maintains the distinction between the creator and the creature. His choice before creation to have the person of Christ with and in him before creation, to have this one enter and redeem created history, and to raise this one from the dead is the beginning of all truth. This word of love, faithfulness, and freedom enforces the distinction between the triune community and the human community. God the Father is free to have this Son and to have his daughters and sons in and through this one. That the perfect and holy God chooses to have his life in and with Jesus Christ and their Spirit is the perfection of his agency. This inexhaustible love and surprising action reveals and distinguishes his being as the one God. The Father chooses to come to us and to be distinguished from us by and with Jesus, the man for others who is God.

³⁷ Ephesians 3:19.

³⁸ Robert Jenson 'The Hidden and Triune God,' *International Journal of Systematic Theology* vol. 2 no.1 (2000), 9.

The triune God's freedom is the perfect mutuality of these persons who are distinct in their relations to creation and distinct in their inter-relations. The Father's freedom is truly different from the Son's. And yet, the freedom of God is actual in the unity of the two because the Spirit perfects the intentions and actions of each. In this way, the Spirit is free to harmonize the conversation that is God. Insofar as we try to predict this freedom we blind ourselves to God's surprising love and infinitely free communion; we shut our ears and cover our eyes claiming to know what must be true of God and his perfect being. However, in faithful response to God's loving action we can describe God's loving sovereignty over creation. In this *a posteriori* response to God's gracious self-giving, the love of God and the freedom of God are known in a way that calls forth hope and trust. By more fully describing this eternity and freedom, Jenson's basic notions are accommodated and extended. God is identified by and with Jesus. Moreover, the eternity and freedom of this choice reveals God as this eternal action maintains the distinction between the triune God and his creatures. In addition, the perfection of this action blinds those who want to define and describe God in abstraction from this one and the same person, Jesus Christ, who lives before, in and after created history.

V. A Final Word

Jenson suggests that theology is actual as a continuing consultation. In his *Systematic Theology* he explains that '[theology] is a discussion and debate that as it continues regularly confronts new questions, and from which participants drop out and into which new participants enter.'³⁹ In this thesis I have argued that Jenson's intervention into this conversation is a constructive word that enlightens the task and proper method of properly Christian discourse about God. It is so first and foremost because Jenson notes and is faithful to the oddity of scripture's witness to the Lord. Beginning with the Resurrection, Jenson proceeds, in light of Nicea's confession, to clearly identify and describe the Father, Son, and Spirit. As a result, his trinitarian description 'is an attentive "following-after" of the movement of God into history in

³⁹ *ST I*, 17.

all of its concreteness.’⁴⁰ When Jenson attends to God’s history his trinitarian description clarifies three things:

1. that the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is the monarch of the triune community who gives being to the Son and Spirit and receives his being through their responsive love – as such, he is the One God of Israel and one person of God;
2. that Jesus Christ, the one Son and Word of his God and Father, is an ontologically basic person that exists in two sets of distinct relationships – this one and the same acts in perfect obedience to the Father in the Spirit for us and our salvation as a person of God;
3. that the Spirit of God is the gift of God given to the Son and to the Son’s community by the Father who is active in this giving as he is active in the triune community – the Spirit is a dependent, but fully actual person of God in relation to the Father, Son, and church.

These descriptions of the perfectly unified and radically distinctive persons of God make it clear that God is truly identified by and with contingent events. Each person of God is known in and through specific acts that are essential to who they are and how they are mutually God. This emphasis on the actuality of the triune God’s existence is conceptualized in Jenson’s theological ontology. This happens as Jenson makes it clear that these three act in perfect unity as persons in relation and so transcend the distinction between act and being. In sum, Jenson’s theological ontology and trinitarian description are significant because he recognizes and confesses that the distinctive and dependent persons are God because of their mutual – not identical – perfection. When this critical insight controls his logic Jenson’s theology makes a significant contribution to the church’s conversation about the freedom of the Father to identify himself by and with Jesus Christ, his life, and his people.

It is, as Jenson has famously noted and apologized for, ‘the fate of every theological system to be dismembered and have its fragments bandied about in an

⁴⁰ Bruce McCormick, ‘The Ontological Presuppositions of Barth’s Doctrine of the Atonement,’ in *The Glory of the Atonement* ed. C.H. Hill and F.A. James III (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 358, describes the basic character of Barth’s theological method in a way that aptly identifies Jenson responds to God’s self-determining action.

ongoing debate.’⁴¹ By describing Jenson’s trinitarian description and the theological ontology, I have entered into this debate to the end of clarifying what is an otherwise mightily compressed, but essentially important argument. I have tried to dismember the whole to the end of making clear a basic insight into the proper way of responding to God’s self-revelation. If Jesus of Nazareth is the Word of God and reveals the will and way of the God he called Father, then our description of the persons and being of God must be guided by a configuration of claims that are shaped in response to his life. If Jesus Christ is God and reveals the Father because he acts as God with God the Spirit, then it seems appropriate to confess that the triune God’s way of being and being present for and with us is primally personal and characteristically direct. This means that our words about God’s being and action need to be controlled by the triune way that God is an object for us. In response to this triune presence we can describe God’s being and the being of all other things. In other words, Jenson can help us develop a christological ontology in the light of which we can speak truly and directly about what it means to be in, with and for the triune God. He can help us speak truly about the triune God, about our life, end, and being as it is given and re-given by the triune God. This is because Jenson helps us to see that our vision of reality must begin with a trinitarian ontology. Thinking and speaking rightly about all things begins with the persons of God and their mutual life in which we are spoken into being and spoken to as God’s creatures.

The strength of Jenson’s identification of God lies in the extent to which he clarifies that the triune God is present with and for his people. Because Jesus of Nazareth is God with God, Jenson is right to assert that God is an object for us. The one God is primally identified by and with Jesus Christ and graciously by and with this Son’s people. The triune God is free to do this and determine the reality of all things in this history. Jenson’s trinitarian description and theological ontology help to clarify that the triune God is perfectly personal and free in and through this. However, we must also move beyond Jenson and speak more fully of Jesus and his life with the Father in the Spirit. More precisely, it is necessary to acknowledge and confess the freedom and eternity of God that is constituted in the perfect mutuality and communion of the persons *before*, in and after created history. This is best done by thinking about how the triune persons are in communion as the one electing God.

⁴¹ *ST I*, 18.

This electing God is a history, as Jenson argues, but this history is the perfect mutual participation of the persons in all the acts and decisions of God. When acknowledgement of this perfect mutuality remains at the centre of our response to God, trinitarian description and theological ontology rightly follow from the freedom and love of the triune God's ecstatic self-determination.

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